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RETURN TO WORK EXPERIENCES OF TEACHERS ON EXTENDED DISABILITY LEAVE

BY

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The undersigned certify that they have read and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research for acceptance, a thesis entitled **RETURN TO WORK EXPERIENCES OF TEACHERS ON EXTENDED DISABILITY LEAVE** submitted by Lewis Michael MacKay in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY in SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGY.

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Abstract

The purpose of this descriptive study was to explore the reentry experiences of teachers who return to work after being on Extended Disability Leave and to discover, what if any, common themes to the experience. Thematic analysis of the descriptions provided by the co-researchers was chosen as the method to explore this experience.

The five females and four males took part in the study were employed by urban school divisions in Alberta. Each participant was interviewed. From the analysis of each script themes were generated.

Analysis of the data revealed the following themes. Theme 1 was The Recovery Process. The subthemes arising from this cluster were 1.1 seeking professional help, 1.2 supporting relationships in recovering health, 1.3 educating self and 1.4 challenging personal beliefs. Theme 2 was the Reentry Experience. Subthemes were 2.1 deciding to return to work, 2.2 working less than full time, 2.3 enduring intense feelings, 2.4 supporting relationships of colleagues once back at work, 2.5 the teacher - administrator relationship, 2.6 watching your health and 2.7 reacting to reentry experiences. Theme 3 was entitled Reentry Issues. Subthemes were 3.1 advising teachers, 3.2 advising school boards, 3.3 using the Extended Disability Package and 3.4 joining support groups. The themes were then discussed in relationship to the literature, implications for EAP programs, delivery of services, return to work and future research.

DEDICATION

To my mother

Beatrice

To my wife's parents

Lionel and Yvonne

and

to my wife

Judy

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Reduced functioning in individuals due to health related causes has been a subject of considerable research in many occupations. Much of this research has focussed on the contributing causes of ill health and the effects illness has on the person and his/her job performance. Considerable research has already been conducted examining the various and often conflicting and competing demands that teachers face and the impact this is having on their health. Much of the research has explored the impact of stress on teachers' ability to teach and their physical and mental health (Farber, 1991; Jenkins and Calhoun, 1991; Byrne, 1991; Pierce and Malloy, 1990; Kyriacou, 1987). Prolonged exposure to these stressors lead some teachers to experience both mental and physical ill health, negatively affecting their working relationship with students and the overall quality and commitment to the educational process (Ryan, 1992; Lunenburg and Cadavid, 1992; Jenkins and Calhoun, 1991; Farber, 1991; Jevne and Zingle, 1992; Kyriacou, 1987). Burnout is not an uncommon response to extended exposure to high levels of stress (Pierce & Molloy, 1990). The stressful nature of teaching as an occupation is becoming one of international concern (Jevne, Zingle, Eng, Ryan, Hazen and Mortemore, 1994). It is apparent that stress is a major but not the sole factor that has contributed to teacher ill health. The fact is that there is an increasing number of teachers who are leaving the classroom due to poor health.

The province of Alberta exemplifies this trend. Teachers are leaving the classroom and going on extended disability in increasing numbers. Tennant, the Alberta General Manger of Disability Claims for Great West Life Insurance Company, as quoted in Howes (1994), stated that in some professional groups, such as teachers and nurses, up to 50% of all disability claims were stress related. A review of provincial statistics of the 1990's indicated that teachers in Alberta have been taking extended benefits for various reasons. The statistics of the Alberta School Employee Benefit Plan (1992), demonstrated that one major treatment claim by teachers who took Long Term Disability (Extended Disability Leave) was emotional/ mental (30.9%), while the rest of the LTD claims were due to physical disorders. It was likely that a number of these physical disorders could have been caused by stress. In another Alberta study, approximately 31% of teachers reported being on LTD due to stress, 40% reported physical conditions as the cause and 29% reported that it was a combination of both (Jevne and Zingle, 1992). In conversation with an official of the Alberta School Employee Benefit Plan, it was reported that as of November, 1997, the number of teachers covered by them and classified as disabled was 542, 20 had experienced reoccurrences, 26 were on Accommodation Employment, 112 on Rehabilitation Employment and there were 99 cases pending.

Some research has taken place within the province as to why teachers are taking the extended benefits and the processes that they may undergo as they try to prepare themselves to return to work (Jevne and Zingle, 1992, Ryan, 1992, Jevne et al., 1994). However, little research has been conducted on their subsequent return. My interest in this return experience originates in the experience of some of my colleagues who have had and /or are presently going through this experience. In talking to these teachers and data gathered from a few readings, (Ryan, 1992; Jevne and Zingle, 1992) it would appear their reactions to this experience vary considerably. Jevne and Zingle (1992) indicated that some teachers may have problems upon reentry. Ryan (1992) stated that in 1991, 30% of the teachers on LTD who returned to work for a large northern school district in Alberta in September of that year were back on disability benefits or at risk for future health problems. A document from the EAP of a large urban school board (October, 1993) recommended that planning be carried out to expand follow-up and relapse prevention services. Such a recommendation may be an indication that they, too, are experiencing similar problems with some teachers attempting to reenter the profession after being on extended disability leave.

As part of the preparation in order to gain access to co-researchers for this dissertation, the researcher wrote a letter to officials of various school boards outlining the aim of the research. They were asked to publish a modified version of their letter, which was provided, in their communications to their teachers. The researcher was encouraged by the support of various school boards in the province in publishing notice of the study in their employee bulletins (Appendix A) and their asking for findings of the completed study. This support may be indicative of the need seen by these boards because some of their teachers may be experiencing difficulty in returning to the classroom after being on extended disability leave.

Research Question

The purpose of the study is to explore the reentry experience of teachers who return to the school system after being on Extended Disability Leave and to discover, what if any are, common themes of the experience. To explore the topic, reentry experiences of teachers, the researcher has chosen as the research question: *What is the experience of teachers who return to the classroom after being on extended disability leave?*

Little information exists about teachers who return to the classroom after being on extended disability leave. This investigation sought to provide descriptions of these experiences. The researcher believed that the best manner to research the topic would be through descriptive methodology. The descriptions provided by the participants would be analyzed in terms of themes suggested by the conceptual framework. The themes are the essential structures to any human experience.

Definitions

To help the reader understand the return to work experience of teachers who have been on extended disability leave, various terms used in this dissertation are examined.

Stress can be defined as the non specific result of any demand upon the body, be the effect mental or somatic (Selye, 1993). Specifically, in teaching, stress may be defined as an experience by a teacher of unpleasant emotions such as tension, frustration, anxiety, anger and depression resulting from aspects of the role as a teacher (Kyriacou, 1987).

Burnout is a term used to describe extreme stress responses which are specifically linked to the emotional strain of dealing extensively with other people (Pierce & Molloy, 1990). A teacher who is going through the process of burnout exhibits the following symptoms: emotional and physical exhaustion, the development of negative and cynical attitude towards his/her students and a tendency to evaluate him/herself negatively, resulting in feelings of lack of personal accomplishment (Byrne, 1991; Pierce & Molloy, 1990).

The definitions of the terms listed below are taken from a brochure entitled *Extended Disability Benefits (July 1, 1996)* published by the Alberta School Employee Benefit Plan. As the ASEBP is the largest insurer of teachers in the province, the majority of participants in the study are covered under its various health plans.

Extended Disability Leave (EDL) is period of leave that begins after short term sick leave finishes. Disability payments are payable only after a 90 day elimination period (while the person is on short term leave). The disability must be total and continuous during these 90 consecutive days. EDL was previously referred to as Long Term Disability Leave (LTD).

Extended Disability Benefits (EDB) are granted to a person who experiences total disability as defined:

during the elimination period, a person is unable to perform the normal duties of his/her occupation, during the next 24 months of disability, the person is unable to perform the duties of his/her normal occupation and after this time, the person is unable to perform the duties of any occupation for which he/she is, or may become, suited through education, training or experience.

Rehabilitation Employment is designed to assist a disabled employee's return to meaningful employment. The program requires an employee to perform light, modified or alternative work during the period of rehabilitation and progressive return to work.

Accommodation Employment provides income protection to disabled employees who are unable to perform all of the regular duties of their occupation due to a progressively debilitating condition. These employees may be able to continue part time employment in a limited capacity. Work hours reduce as the person's ability to work decreases.

Organization of the Dissertation

This document is organized into five chapters. Chapter 1, the Introduction, has presented information on the genesis of the question as well as an the purpose of the study. Chapter 2 contains a review of the literature related to this topic. Chapter 3 provides an explanation of descriptive methodology, the researcher's presuppositions and how the participants were selected. The procedures used to gather and to analyze the data are also presented. Chapter 4 examines the commonalities that were found across the individual descriptions of the reentry experience and develop themes which emerged from the participants' descriptions. Chapter 5 provides an opportunity for a general discussion of the themes. Attention is also focussed on the implications for educators on the findings about the reentry stage and, arising from this, the development of procedures which could assist teachers with their reentry process.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

Research on the experiences of teachers who have been on EDL and their reentry experiences to the school system are relatively scarce. In the province of Alberta, a significant treatment issue by teachers who take EDL was emotional/mental (30.9%), while the rest of the claims were due to physical disorders (ASEBP, 1992). Jevne and Zingle (1992) reported that approximately 31% of the teachers reported being on EDL due to stress another 40% reported physical conditions and finally 29% reported it being a combination of both. This literature review will examine the impact of gender, teaching environment, teacher beliefs and social supports on teacher stress and burnout. As well, returning to work research as it specifically to teachers will be examined.

Stress and Burnout

The impact of stress on teachers' ability to teach and their physical and mental health has been a subject of increasing interest to researchers. Stress can be defined as the non specific result of any demand upon the body, be the effect mental or somatic (Selye, 1993). Specifically, in teaching, stress may be defined as an experience by a teacher of unpleasant emotions such as tension, frustration, anxiety, anger and depression resulting from aspects of the role as a teacher

(Kyriacou, 1987). The causes of teacher stress have been written about extensively (Farber, 1991; Jenkins and Calhoun, 1991; Byrne, 1991; Pierce and Malloy, 1990; Kyriacou, 1987). Prolonged exposure to these stressors leads some teachers to experience both mental and physical ill health, negatively affecting their working relationship with the pupils and affecting the overall quality and commitment of the teacher to the education process (Ryan ,1992; Lunenburg and Cadavid, 1992; Jenkins and Calhoun, 1991; Farber, 1991; Jevne and Zingle, 1992; Kyriacou, 1987). Burnout is a term used to describe extreme stress responses which are specifically linked to the emotional strain of dealing extensively with other people (Pierce & Molloy, 1990). A teacher who is going through the process of burnout exhibits the following symptoms: emotional and physical exhaustion, the development of negative and cynical attitudes towards his/her students and a tendency to evaluate him/herself negatively, resulting in feelings of lack of personal accomplishment (Byrne, 1991; Pierce & Molloy, 1990). Much research has been and is being conducted to help determine the relationship between stress and burnout and various personal biographical and psychological factors. Perhaps by understanding how these factors interrelate, one can come to a better understanding of how and why the phenomena affects people in different ways and what can be done to lessen its impact.

Gender and Teacher Stress

One demographic factor is gender and various attempts have been made to determine the degree of the relationship between gender and job stress. As a result of their study, Ogus, Greenglass and Burke (1990) believed that men were "more likely to experience depersonalization then women because of greater work stress and less adequate coping strategies" (p. 387). They further stated that men that were high in depersonalization were more likely to take drugs and neglect their health and that such behavior could interfere with the effectiveness of their teaching. Fontana and Abouserie (1993) also explored the possibility of gender differences and personality differences in stress levels. Their findings led them to believe that there was no great variation on the sources of stress. They concluded that personality characteristics do "contribute more to stress levels in teachers then do variables of either age or gender" (p. 226).

Factors in the Teaching Environment that Contribute to Stress and Burnout

Defrank and Stroup (1989) acknowledged the fact that stress in teaching is derived from many sources and there is evidence linking stress to physical and mental health. They created a model and conducted a study to examine the linkages among personal factors, job stress, job satisfaction and symptomatology. Their model suggested "that stress may influence indices of health through both direct and indirect pathways" (p. 100). Their model proposed that teaching history and personal factors influence the level of stress and that job stress influences the level of job satisfaction. Personal factors, job stress and job satisfaction have an effect on a person's level of health. Their study sample consisted of 245 teacher elementary teachers in Texas, 96% of whom were female. Each was mailed a questionnaire packet consisting of questions seeking demographic information, the Teacher Occupational Stress Factor Questionnaire, a job satisfaction questionnaire and, finally, a rating scale on the frequency and severity of health problems. Much of the stress reported by these teachers came from such things as appraisals, time constraints and extracurricular activities. The authors asserted "that personal and teaching history demonstrated very little predictive power in this study, possibly due to the power of environmental forces in the occupation. ... When stress leads to decrements in job satisfaction, however, the resultant impact on health may be seen" (p. 107). One of their main conclusions is that focusing on programs to enhance coping skills is not enough but any attempts to reduce stress also must address environmental and policy sources of that stress.

Pierce and Malloy (1990) identified biographical and work characteristics, psychological and response variables between teachers at the secondary level experiencing high and low level of burnout. Work characteristics included type of school employed (government vs non government schools), time employed and position in the school. The psychological factors investigated included role stress, social support, disposition of hardiness and teacher - pupil control ideologies. The study consisted of a sample of 750 teachers in Australia who completed several questionnaires. Of the sample about 3.7% were considered to be experiencing high levels of burnout. One conclusion of the study was that biographical factors were less significant factors of burnout than work patterns and psychological variables. The authors' results also indicated "the experience of high levels of burnout leads some teachers to develop reduced levels of commitment" (p. 49). Teachers who worked in low socio economic status schools experienced higher levels of stress than those who worked in higher socio economic status schools. The study results also indicated that teachers "who experience high levels of burnout use regressive coping skills more frequently than teachers who experience low levels of burnout" (p. 49). However, the researchers were not able to determine "whether teachers are more likely to experience high levels of burnout because they were using regressive coping strategies or whether they are more likely to use regressive coping strategies because they have experienced high levels of burnout" (p. 49). These regressive coping skills were defined as strategies such as escaping from the situation and /or denying it.

A study was conducted by Byrne (1991) to investigate the impact of particular background variables on three dimensions of burnout. These dimensions were emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and personal accomplishment. A second focus of her study was to delineate the factors that were contributing most to teachers' feelings of work related stress. In her own review of the research, she reported that results to date had been mixed regarding teacher gender and depersonalization. Byrne reported that some research indicated younger teachers "have shown significantly higher levels of emotional exhaustion then their older colleagues" (p. 198). She maintained that years of experience does not appear to be an important variable for burnout. Research also indicated that high school teachers and teachers that taught special needs students were more likely to suffer from burnout than regular classroom teachers. Her sample consisted of 642 teachers representing elementary to university teaching levels who were required to complete questionnaires. Instruments used were the Educator Survey of the Maslach Burnout Inventory and the Teacher Stress Survey. Her findings revealed that public school system teachers indicated that "younger educators exhibited significantly lower levels of perceived personal accomplishments than their older colleagues" (p. 200)., and "that the types of student taught does have "an important impact on emotional exhaustion for high school teachers and on the perceptions of personal accomplishment" (p. 206). The common stressors educators stated were time constraints, number of students, multiplicity of expected roles, lack of administrative support/parental support (p. 207). She felt that her findings for public school teachers were consistent with those previously reported in the North American milieu.

Research was carried out in Finland by Salo (1995) "to examine the extent to which different sources of teachers' stress, coping resources, background variables and different ways of coping determined teacher stress during the autumn term" (p. 205). His study was longitudinal in nature in that he used 66 of the 70 teachers from Finland who had participated in a study in 1983-84. The mean age of the sample was 50.7 years, 80% were from urban areas, 54% were women, 36% taught Elementary school, 36% Junior High and the remaining 28% taught High School. Salo's research examined coping strategies. He stated that the most common way of coping teachers used were problem orientated (problem solving , social support and thinking about work alone). The second most important way was palliative, that is, avoidance of thinking about work and devoting oneself to free time activities (p. 210). The use of stimulants as a way of coping was very uncommon among teachers (p. 210). Salo stated that he felt his results supported earlier findings that coping with stress in the teaching profession is generally quite ineffective. These earlier studies Rajala, 1988 and Borg and Falzon 1990, as quoted in Salo, provided evidence to conclude that middle aged and experienced teachers' coping processes were rather stable and fell within a narrow band of strategies. Salo reported that anxiety "is seen as a short term stress indicator, while depression and exhaustion are seen as results of prolonged stress processes. Anxiety did not paralyze as badly as did depression and exhaustion" (p. 220). Salo's final recommendation was that interventions should begin at the beginning of the stress process " when colleagues start to irritate other colleagues and to cause anxiety" (p. 221).

In summary, the results of the research in this area indicate that reasons for high levels of burnout in schools can be attributed in part to the very environment in which teachers work. It is an environment marked by time constraints, high pupil to student ratios, multiplicity of expected roles and lack of administrative and parental support. When faced with these factors on a daily basis, teachers resort to a narrow band of coping strategies which have worked in the past but in time become increasingly less effective in dealing with their situation. As a result for some teachers, the stress level becomes so overpowering that it can eventually lead to burnout. Providing teachers with more ways of handling stress may help some but making fundamental changes to their environment was viewed as being more effective.

Teacher Beliefs and Their Relationship to Stress and Burnout

Friedman and Farber (1992) examined "the relationship of teacher burnout to the various ways teachers view themselves professionally and to the ways in which they sense others within the educational system view them" (p. 28). Their sample consisted of 1017 elementary teachers from Israel. Instruments used in the study included a questionnaire, a modified version of the Maslach Burnout Inventory, and sections of the Tennessee Self Concept Scale and the Perdue Teacher Opinionnaire. They concluded that "a teacher needs to feel satisfied by their work to avoid burnout and second, that from a teacher's perspective, the job of educating students is made far more difficult by the failure of others to understand the complexity, responsibilities and stresses inherent in teaching" (p. 35).

In an unpublished Doctoral Dissertation entitled Self defeating Beliefs and Stress in Teachers, Chorney (1997) examined the relationship between teacher stress and teacher expectations. From the questionnaires returned, a list of belief statements was generated, and from this list another list of 41 self defeating beliefs was formulated. This last list, as well as an abbreviated form of the The Teacher Stress Inventory, were sent to a large number of teachers in North Central Alberta. One finding of the study was that "high endorsement of the belief statements was found to be associated with high stress levels" (p. 99). Another finding was that high stress scores were found "to endorse beliefs from the support theme with significantly greater strength than the low stress group" (p. 103). The author suggested one reason for this could be that "participants could be experiencing unsupportive environments and reported higher stress levels as a result" (p. 103). An alternative hypothesis offered was that " an overall belief in the need for the intervention of an outside agency in order to be a good teacher results in increased stress levels" (p. 103). Chorney stated that her findings did suggest "that there a large number of teachers at risk for having unrealistic self-expectations in the workplace" (p. 104) and these beliefs, in turn, may well be contributing to the stress levels they are experiencing.

Social Support and Its Relationship to Teacher Stress and Burnout

Russell, Altmaier and Van Velzen (1987) examined the different facets of social support on teacher burnout, specifically the impact of job related stresses and social support on teacher burnout. Their sample was 316 Iowa teachers who were asked to fill out several questionnaires on job related stress, social support and burnout. Their results were that:

1. "Three aspects of social support received by teachers involving support from their supervisor, reassurance of worth and reliable alliance were found to be predictive of burnout" (p. 272).

2. Age also played a factor with the number of stressful events being reported was more by younger teachers then older teachers. One suggestion posed for this difference was that "older individuals may be more reticent in reporting stressful events" (p. 273).

A study which tested a series of hypotheses concerning the relationships among job stress associated with teaching, stress induced illness behavior, and social support by principals and co-workers was conducted by Dworkin, Haney, Dworkin and Telschow (1990). Their sample was 291 teachers from a teachers' union in one of America's large urban school districts. The results of their study indicated the following:

1. Teachers who had supportive principals were less likely to report stress induced illness than those with unsupportive principals. Furthermore, they stated that the principal is central to reducing stress -induced illness among teachers and reported that principals who treat their teachers "as valued and trusted colleagues not only reduces

burnout; such individuals also lower the rate of illness" (p. 70).

2. One hypothesis of the study was that "teachers assigned to schools where co-workers were seen as supportive will report less stress-induced illness than teachers assigned to schools where co-workers are seen as unsupportive" (p. 63). It was found that co-workers do not reduce the level of stress-induced illness reported by teachers. The authors stated that "this could be due to differences in stress levels associated with supportive and unsupportive co-workers, thus explaining any differences in stress-induced illness between groups of teachers with supportive and unsupportive colleagues" (p. 67).

In her unpublished Master's thesis entitled, The Experience of Principals When Dealing with Teachers with Health Disabling Conditions, Zimmerman (1992) stated that principals' roles in this issue is complex. She attributed this to the fact that principals may not have the necessary training or experience or support when dealing with these issues. She also stated that some of the principals in her sample "seemed less aware than is helpful of the crucial role they can play in teacher wellness" (p. 63).

In their review of the literature concerning social support, Hobfull and Vaux (1993) noted that "like stress, social support has a complex effect on our well being" (p. 685). The authors viewed social support as a metaconstruct and, to them, the three social support constructs were: a social support network, supportive behavior and subjective appraisal of support (p. 686). Hobfull and Vaux described in some detail the traditional models of support, these being the buffer model and the direct effect model. They also offer a third model which they termed the conservation of resources model which briefly stated is "that people strive to obtain, retain and protect what they value" (p. 688). They stated that this model is more complex and may better reflect the effect of social support. They believe "that social support is important not only because it is a link to mental and physical health, but because the establishment and maintenance of close ties is an important aspect of well being " (p. 697).

Greenglass, Fiksenbaum and Burke (1995) conducted a study that "employs a process model of burnout in order to assess factors related to burnout over time in teachers" (p. 241). The process model holds that "sources of stress can function as antecedents of burnout." Their sample consisted of 361 male and female fulltime teachers from a large urban board in Canada. One of the findings of the study was that "the teacher's level of burnout depends on the extent to which he/she reports receiving social support from friends and relatives one year earlier" (p. 245). The authors also stated that "in the absence of ongoing supportive network, burnout increases with stressors in the environment" (p. 245). The more supports one has overall burnout rates are lower. Social support is defined in the present study as informational, practical and emotional support. The authors maintained that their "data support a buffering effect of social supports over a period of a year" (p. 247).

To conclude, the literature would suggest that social support is an important aspect of our well being. Social support real or perceived has an impact on the reduction of the levels of stress. The principal's role in this regard has been expressed as central, yet principals often do not understand or have not yet come to an appreciation of their role in the promotion or reduction in teacher health. Family and colleagues support is also viewed as important. Failure to have adequate social support helps contribute to the environment that overtime may require a teacher to go on EDL. As well, failure to have a good social support network upon reentry of teachers after being on EDL may make the task very difficult.

Factors Affecting Return to Work

As mentioned earlier, the review of literature that described factors affecting return to work was limited to research that applied specifically to teachers.

A rare picture of what the LTD experience was like for some Alberta teachers was provided by the research of Jevne and Zingle (1992). They conducted interviews with 72 educators of whom 46 had been or were recipients of long term disability. The purposes of the research were to explore aspects of teacher health, primarily teachers with health disabling conditions, including the relationship of numerous personal and contextual factors (p. iii). Jevne and Zingle (1992) examined health from the continuum point of view with wholeness at one extreme and brokenness at the other. Based upon the descriptions provided by their teacher sample, they concluded that teachers on disability go through four phases which they termed as: Recognizing I' m Trouble, Making the Transition to LTD, Rehabilitating and finally, Seeking Resolution (p. 5). Their study examined the teachers' feelings, actions and thoughts at each stage of this process.

Jevne and Zingle (1992) indicated that some teachers may have problems upon reentry. Ryan (1992) stated that in 1991, 30% of the teachers on LTD who returned to work for a large northern school district in Alberta in September of that year were back on disability benefits or at risk for future health problems. An internal document from large urban district EAP to the its School Board (October, 1993) recommended that planning be carried out to expand follow-up and relapse prevention services. Such a recommendation may be an indication that they too are experiencing similar problems with some teachers trying to re-enter the profession.

Jevne and Zingle (1992) reported that it was not uncommon for teachers to return to work with feelings of both fear and excitement. They stated that successful reentry has occurred in situations where the teacher felt ready to go back to work, the board was sensitive to teacher placement, the placement provided a supportive environment and finally, there was the possibility of ongoing treatment (p. 112-115).

Research from Australia published by Young and Russell (1995) explored "the extent to which injured workers' return to work outcomes could be predicted using demographic information, details about the nature of their problem (psychometric) and information concerning the way their case progressed " (p. 223). Return to work was defined as returning to work for at least four months and included individuals who were working a time greater than or equal to .6 of a fulltime position. As one rationale for their study, they stated that in 1991-1992, 4% of the Public Service Workers who were covered by their workers' compensation system were off for stress related conditions and the costs of working with these people accounted for 18% of the total rehabilitation costs of this organization. Their sample consisted of 119 teachers who were receiving treatment. They were employed by urban boards, 36 were primary teachers, 83 were secondary, their mean age was 42.9 years and the average time off work was 470 days. Each participant supplied demographic information and completed the Derogatis Stress Profile and the General Health Questionnaire. Using statistical analysis, they found that the best demographic predictors of return to work were sex, grade level taught and the number of days required to return to work. Specifically, in their study, females who taught at the primary level and who had attempted a return to work within 505 days were more likely to return (p. 227). According to the authors, the best psychometric predictor was the Health Score achieved by a client on the Derogatis Stress Profile (p. 231).

Cary Cherniss (1995), in his book Beyond Burnout, examined the issue of burnout from a longitudinal perspective. He first conducted a study of 26 helping professionals whom he classified as burning out early in their careers. The original sample included six lawyers, seven high school teachers, six public health nurses, and seven mental health professionals. Some 10 years later he went back to revisit members of the same professional sample who would participate in order to determine how their life had changed in the interim. According to Cherniss the major sources of stress for these professionals were:

1. Competency
2. The professional versus the system. Professionals are often seen as independent, however this autonomy has proved elusive and contributed to the feelings of being less then competent
3. Difficulties with clients made it difficult for professionals to feel affective and competent.
4.Boredom and work routine at times the work can become uninteresting and the professional role could seem insignificant.
5. Lack of collegiality. Colleagues it was felt were needed to achieve a sense of competence. Colleagues also provided antidotes to feelings of loneliness and incompetence.
6. Cherniss also believed that the social context of the times, including the bureaucracy, societal attitudes contribute, as well, to increasing levels of stress. (Cherniss, pp. 18-27)

As the stress led to burnout Cherniss also noted the following changes in these professionals: the adoption of more modest goals that makes it easier to succeed, blaming someone else or the system for the lack of success, liking clients less and eventually dropping out.

In his discussion with his sample, they reported many things that they did to recover from burnout. According to Cherniss, the most important one was the nature of the work itself. "For helping professionals to sustain their caring and commitment over a long period of time, there must be a balance between giving and getting. The more they give, the more rewarding the work must be for them, and meaningful work is intrinsically rewarding" (p. 121). Cherniss stated the characteristics of this meaningful work included: making an impact, intellectual challenge, change, cultivating special interests in the job, and making these special interest rewarding.

Cherniss also put forth several "antidotes to burnout" and these included increasing personal autonomy, a supportive work setting which included recognition and feedback, interest of the boss, support for continued learning, and collegial relationships with others (pp. 135-150).

Cherniss went on to point out that several things can be done to potentially reduce the number of people burning out. He suggested that planning for a better work environment would help. One suggestion that he had was to have supervisors and administrators and staff address issues of concern together and that time be set aside for this purpose. Such a practice would result in gathering data about the work environment from the staff, evaluating same and then looking for ways to make changes. Another proposal he made was to have organizations have staff develop special interest projects in their jobs. Such a step can facilitate growth in the individual and help in the delivery of programs to individuals. He also suggested that it would be useful to give people the skills to handle clients that they may never have had before. Such training could include such things as providing the professional with realistic goals, engaging in dialogue with other teachers in the same situation, seeking out professionals with expertise and engaging with them in discussions or mentoring the implementation of ideas. Cherniss also maintained that human service professionals should be informed as to how the system works, how it responds to change and the most effective way to bring about change. Such knowledge he felt would allow professionals to negotiate "new arrangements that meet the twin needs of efficiency and compassion." (p. 175). Three other recommendations that he had were to rely more on the quality of previous work experiences in selecting professionals, provide for more career counselling and development and finally, give the professional a greater role in planning change (pp. 175-180).

He also related that one of the most important findings of his study was the failure of the subjects to comment on meaning in their work. He refers to several existential writers such as Frankl and how important meaning is to one's existence. Cherniss maintained that it is not stress that causes burnout but lack of meaning in one's life. He demonstrated this by looking at a religious community and from his observations he stated that these groups did not suffer from burnout and the reasons for this were their moral commitment, their belief in a set of ideas and being devoted to these ideas and a belief in something greater than themselves (p. 186). He maintained that "helping professionals are less likely to burn out when they are committed to a transcendent set of moral beliefs and when they work in a community based on those beliefs" (p. 186). Meaning in life can be found in religion, a cause to which one commits oneself and the love of another person. The challenge is transforming professional organizations into moral communities.

In reviewing the literature concerning factors affecting return to work several issues emerge which would appear to be relatively important. Employers have to become more involved in the process of return to work and provide a more understanding and supportive environment. This should include such things as return to work policies which address work modification and the creation of supportive networks for the returning employee. Opportunities should be provided whereby the employer and employee participate together to plan a better work environment. In terms of the employee, especially those involved in the caring professions, they had to recognize that there had to be a balance between giving and getting. The more the employee gives the more rewarding the work must be for them. Organizations must recognize this and provide work that is meaningful and intrinsically rewarding.

Summary

Much of the research has been focused on antecedents of stress and burnout and their affects on the teacher. Some important factors that have been identified that have contributed to teachers going on EDL were the work environment, perceived lack of support and conflicting expectations. From the review, there is very little literature that explores what happens to teachers when they are forced to leave work due to ill health and no published studies to date that examine the experiences of teachers when they return to work.

The limited research that has been conducted that would indicate that for successful return to work, some of the very factors mentioned above have to be resolved. That is the work environment must be supportive, understanding and responsive to the needs of those returning. Supportive links have to be provided and the person returning must be able to resolve, in their own mind, the issues associated with conflicting expectations. From the research, it is apparent that there is no one single factor which can be identified as contributing more to successful return to work than any other. The limited research would indicate that there may be several factors and that they would appear to interact and thus create an environment that makes the likelihood of return to work more likely and sustainable.

Given the lack of published research on the teachers who return to work after prolonged illness, the present study will explore the experiences of teachers who return to work after being on extended disability leave. As well, the majority of research into teacher health and related issues has been quantitative in nature and the lived experience of developing a health disabling condition as an educator has not been addressed (Jevne, Zingle, Eng, Ryan, Hazen and Mortemore, 1994). In order to grasp the human experience, the researcher has chosen to use descriptive methodology in the study. From the researcher's analysis of the descriptions provided by the participants, themes would be generated that would provide a fuller description of this lived experience. A more detailed description of the methodology used in this study follows in the next chapter.

Chapter 3

Methodology

Qualitative Research

Research within psychology is conducted by using natural science or human science methods. The distinction between these two methods is attributed to Dilthey (Van Manen, 1990). Whereas natural science attempts to taxonomize natural phenomena or tries to explain the behavior of things, human science aims at explaining the nature of phenomena and at understanding the lived structures of meanings (Van Manen, 1990).

The majority of research in psychology has been conducted using the natural science or quantitative approach (Osborne, 1994). Using this method, the phenomenon under investigation has to be observable, measurable and must be such that it is possible for more than one observer to agree on its existence and characteristics (Valle, King and Halling, 1989). Giorgi (1985), like Dilthey a century earlier, believed that certain aspects of the experienced phenomena were better understood by using methods other than the natural science approach. In reaction to the beliefs that the natural scientific method might be limiting, the human science or qualitative method developed. Emphasis in research using this model was upon description and meaning rather than the traditional natural science criteria of prediction, control and measurement (Osborne, 1994). Moustakas (1994) stated that the common elements of human science research includes:

> 1.recognizing the value of qualitative designs and methodologies ...
> 2. focusing on the wholeness of the experience...
> 3. searching for meanings and essences of the experience...
> 4. obtaining descriptions of experience through first person accounts in informal or formal conversations and interviews
> 5. regarding the data as imperative in understanding human behavior and as evidence for scientific investigations
> 6. formulating questions and problems that reflect the interest, involvement and personal commitment of the researcher
> 7. viewing the experience and behavior as an integrated and inseparable relationship of subject and object and of parts and whole (Moustakas, 1994, p. 21).

One of the features of qualitative research is that it is descriptive. "The written results of qualitative research contain quotations from the data to illustrate and substantiate the presentation" (Bogdan and Biklen, 1992, p. 30). Qualitative inquiry has several theoretical traditions. This study is descriptive, however, the methods employed in this study including its design, data collection and analysis were drawn from Collaizzi (1978) who follows the phenomenological tradition.

Phenomenology is a philosophy, that is, a way of thinking about reality and a way that reality can become known. Edmund Husserl is considered to be the founder of phenomenology (Giorgi, 1985). To Husserl, phenomenology was a way to describe how the world was constituted and experienced through conscious (lived) acts. Furthermore, it was the study of the lifeworld - the world as we immediately experience it prereflectively, that is without preconceptions or notions about the experience (Van Manen, 1990). In psychology, phenomenology as a research perspective acknowledges the reality of the realm of meaningful experience as the fundamental locus of knowledge (Polkinghorne, 1989). Emphasis is placed upon the descriptions of the research subjects and focuses upon the meanings of the experiences to those involved.

In qualitative research methodology, when discussing an experience, the researcher is talking about the lived experience of the participant. Therefore for the rest of the study when the researcher uses the word experience it is assumed to mean lived experience. This present study used the descriptions provided by the participants and other data. In the present study, analysis of the data involved the search for and identification of common threads or themes that extended throughout the research material. Identification of the themes would formulate the essential structures of their experience of returning to the classroom after being on Extended Disability Leave and help us to understand the experience.

Validity

Patton (1990) maintained that issues of credibility in qualitative research depended upon "three distinct but related inquiry elements:

1. rigorous techniques and methods for gathering high quality data that is carefully analyzed with attention to issues of validity, reliability and triangulation;

2. the credibility of the researcher which is dependent upon training experience, track record, status and presentation of self; and

3. philosophical belief that is a fundamental appreciation of naturalistic inquiry, qualitative methods, inductive analysis and holistic thinking:" (p. 461).

Sandelowski (1986) believed that truth in qualitative research lies in the discovery of the phenomenon or experiences as lived by subjects. Truth is subject orientated rather than researcher defined. Efforts were made by the researcher in the present study through multiple conversations with the participants, verifying transcripts and emergent themes to orientate the study towards the participant. Brink (1991) believed that concurrent pragmatic validity was the most crucial validation procedure in qualitative research. Pragmatic validity can be achieved through multiple collection methods and procedures on the same data (Brink 1991). "How much the results of qualitative research can be relied upon depends upon the consistency, stability, and repeatability of data collection methods, in other words, its reliability" (p. 175). In this current study, this was achieved through the use of triangulation which will be discussed more fully later in this chapter

Sandelowski, (1986) stated that a study is credible when "it presents such faithful descriptions or interpretations of a human experience that people having the experience would immediately recognize it from those descriptions or interpretations as their own" (p. 30). Brink (1991) would appear to support Sandelowski' s statement on credibility. Brink (1991) stated that validity is established when the reader says "that's exactly what happened to me". Maxwell (1992) agreed with Wolcott (1990) that in qualitative research understanding is a more fundamental concept than validity and "that validity pertains to the kind of understanding that accounts can embody" (p. 284). A later researcher, Janesick (1994), would agree with Maxwell. She stated that "validity in qualitative research has to do with description and explanation and whether or not a given explanation fits a given description" (p. 216).

Triangulation

One method to increase the reliability of a qualitative research study is through triangulation. There are several types of triangulation including: triangulation of data sources, method triangulation, analyst triangulation and theory/ perspective triangulation (Patton, 1990, Janesick, 1994). Both triangulation of data sources and analyst triangulation were employed in this study.

Data Sources Triangulation

Triangulation of data sources "means validating information obtained through interviews, by checking through program documents and other written evidence that can corroborate what the interview respondents report" (Patton, p. 467). In this particular study, several sources of information were used including documents from school boards, literature, interviews with a Director of an Employee Assistance Program for a large school board, statistical information from the major insurer of teachers in the province, multiple meetings with the co-researchers and validation by the participants themselves.

Analyst Triangulation

Analyst triangulation occurs when the participants react to the description elicited from the interviews data analysis and the emergent themes that have arisen. In this study, the interviews were transcribed, each one was given back to its respective participant for review to ensure the accuracy of what was said, and any changes suggested by each of the participants were incorporated into their respective revised transcript. Then each transcript was analyzed. The analysis and the themes were presented to each participant for their review, discussion and validation. As well, the themes were reviewed by a group of teachers who are or have been on EDL. Two members of the group took part in the present study, the rest had not. This process gave further credibility to the findings.

Generalizability

Sandelowski (1986) stated the generalizability is an illusion since "every research situation is intimately about a particular researcher's interaction with a particular context" (p. 31). Patton (1990) claimed that "evaluators using qualitative methods provide perspective rather than truth, empirical assessment of decision maker's theories of action rather than generation and verification of universal theories, and context bound extrapolations rather than generalizations" (p. 491). Maxwell (1992) agreed with Patton when he stated that "qualitative researchers rarely make claims about the external generalizability of their accounts" (p. 294). Kvale (1996) stated a similar view when he wrote "in the post modern era,... the quest for knowledge is replaced by an emphasis on the heterogeneity and contextuality of knowledge, with a shift from generalization to contextualization" (p. 232). This current study has offered extrapolations or "modest speculations on the likely applicability of findings to other situations under similar but not identical conditions " (Patton, p. 489). The researcher has attempted to gather data that provides for a rich description of urban Albertan teachers who have been on EDL and their return to work experiences. From an analysis of their descriptions, an understanding of the experience can be obtained.

Researcher Credibility

Patton (1990) has identified the qualities of the researcher as an important factor in achieving credibility in qualitative research. The researcher has worked in the school system as an educator for almost 24 years. As well, experience gained as a psychology intern at the Workers' Compensation Board Rehabilitation Centre has allowed the researcher to be part of the lives of several clients as they have prepared themselves to go back to work after serious injury. This researcher has completed two courses in qualitative research, one of which was in the area of phenomenology. Through seminar discussion and completion and presentation of papers of various lengths, the researcher has acquired the necessary training to conduct this study.

Also as part of a course requirement, the researcher conducted a phenomenological study on one teacher and her return to work experience. This training has made the researcher aware of the necessity of putting into place the various verification and validation procedures to establish a credible description. As well, the researcher is aware of his own presuppositions that may affect any analysis or interpretation that was undertaken during the study. By acknowledging these predispositions and working closely with the participants, the influences of the researcher's own experiences would be minimized.

Undertaking the Research

In doing qualitative research, the researcher is called upon to be both the instrument of the research and the analyzer of the data. Why would the researcher undertake this study? Interest in this topic has been generated due to the experiences of some colleagues who have had and /or are presently going through this experience. I have seen them break into tears and exclaim that no one cares or understands. They have taken time off from their employment and eventually went on long term disability leave, gone through a process of isolation from their friends, sought help from various types of health care professionals, and begun the process of recovery to return to work. In some cases their return to work was accomplished fairly smoothly; in others, the return to work process resulted in the resumption of their leave. In talking to them and gathering research from readings (Ryan, 1992; Jevne and Zingle, 1992), it would appear that the reactions of the researcher's friends to this process are in no way different from others in this predicament. By hearing from the teachers themselves, as they went or go through the period of reentry, a better description of the experience can be established. As well, the experiences of these participants can be used to develop procedures which could assist teachers with their reentry process.

Subjectivity of the Researcher

Subjectivity is composed of those qualities of the researcher that could affect the observational investigation. These personal qualities have the capacity to filter, skew, shape, block, transform, construe and misconstrue what transpires from the outset of a research project to its culmination in a written statement (Peshkin, 1987). Acknowledgment of these biases is important because it enables me to be aware of them and their possible influence on the research as I carry on. The biases which I have recognized include:

1. I have had the opportunity to read journal articles, talk to other teachers, representatives of the Alberta School Employee Benefit Plan (ASEBP) and to psychologists who work with teachers on long term leave. The results of these inquiries have led me to believe that the problem is much worse than reported and the expectations from all those sources are that more and more teachers over the next few years will be taking long term leave and, therefore, potentially more teachers will be faced with the experience of returning to work after being on long term leave.

2. My employment as a teacher, administrator and/or as a counsellor for twenty years undoubtedly contributes to my subjectivity. I believe that teachers have an extremely difficult job which is made more difficult by the conflicting demands of society in general. How does one satisfy these competing demands? If a teacher had only to teach perhaps the job would be more manageable because we could set a standard and work towards it. However, teaching is only one aspect of the job and, at times, the role can include performing duties similar to those carried out by a parent, minister, nurse, counselor and policeman. Teaching is often a lonely process as the teacher and his or her students interact in isolation. I believe that teaching is most effective when the teacher and the parent are in regular communication with each other and the child is also an integral part of this process. However, at times this does not happen and the relationship, instead of being marked by mutual support and co operation, is bitter and combative. Doing my research in an education area affecting teachers will no doubt be affected by the experiences and attitudes I have formulated about the education process and the teachers' role in it.

3. In my particular case, the fact that several of my close friends have experienced different results upon return to work after being on long term leave, I believe, has contributed to my subjective view of the experience. First of all, I have been part of their return to work process both as a colleague and a friend. I have been part of their good days and bad days, the squabbles among the staff and finally a confidant of their

experiences with administration and other teachers at both a school based and district level. I have been there when the tears flowed and the spirits were high. These experiences have shaped me and made me aware of the hostility that some teachers have toward administrators and how they blame this group for many of the difficulties they faced before taking Extended Disability Leave (EDL) and upon returning to the classroom.

4. My experience had indicated to me that it is often the best teachers who go on EDL. These teachers for the most part have given long hours of dedicated service to their boards in delivering an education to students. As a result of this, I believe that the boards have a responsibility to these teachers and that teachers should be given special consideration by boards as they try to reenter their profession.

5. Another factor that may contribute to my subjectivity is as a counsellor, I want to work with teachers who are in EHB process. In the simplest terms, the fact that I want a position in that field could contribute to my being rather biased about my description of the phenomenon under investigation. Presenting a picture which clearly would indicate the need for people to work in this area in the counseling role, may further contribute to my subjectivity. There may be a political side to be considered in this issue. LTD programs cost school boards and insurance companies a great deal of money. I view my topic as potentially politically sensitive especially in the periods of decreasing educational dollars.

6. In addition at the Workers Rehabilitation Centre, I was employed as a Psychology Intern for a year and I witnessed and was involved with these workers as they attempted to get ready to reenter the work place after injury. As one listened to their stories, one found it was difficult not to be impacted by the way their lives had often been transformed as a result of the injury. Examples of the transformation, for some, included a lasting permanent injury or work restriction, loss of income, a realization that without further education they would never have the lifestyle they had been accustomed, strained personal relationships and emotional scaring. In dealing with the WCB, some of the workers often expressed complete distrust of the WCB system, a distrust brought in part about by a lack of understanding how the system works and their dealings with some Claims Managers. This work experience demonstrated to me daily the dramatic affect of an injury on the individual and those immediately surrounding them. Such exposure makes it difficult for me not to have sympathy for workers who are injured either physically or emotionally and, at times, if I am not careful, it can cloud my objectivity.

7. I also believe that each interview I conducted had a personal effect on me. As I listened to each story, I became aware of the issues faced by the teachers as they attempted recovery and reentry. The sense of loss, fear and the continuing challenges that had to be overcome on an almost daily basis to avoid slipping back has been part of the experience that I have shared. Listening to these stories and sharing their experiences

has no doubt contributed to my strong feelings about the subject and the belief that something must be done to make the return to work experience more successful for these teachers.

Only by acknowledging my subjectivity and taking steps to monitor myself at each stage of the process was I be able to present an accurate picture of the experience of teachers who return to the classroom after being on Extended Disability Leave.

Selecting Participants

A purposeful sampling process was used to select the participants for the study. Through this method information rich cases can be selected which can provide a great deal about the issues of central importance to the purpose of the research, thus the term purposeful sampling (Streubert and Carpenter, 1995, Osborne, 1994; Patton, 1990). Patton (1990) described several examples of purposeful sampling and for this study I have chosen to use both maximum variation sampling and criterion sampling strategies. Maximum variation sampling documents unique or diverse variations that have emerged in adapting to different conditions. It allows for identification of important common patterns that cut across variations. The final list of participants included both males and females, from urban Catholic and Public districts, and from each of the levels of public schooling who have been on EDL. Using this rationale, the experiences of teachers returning to work after being EDL leave were obtained from a wider spectrum of Alberta's educational community. Credibility is heightened if common patterns among these representative coresearchers during the reentry process are established.

Criterion sampling was used in establishing the sample for this study. The criterion for the participants proposed for this study was that they must be certificated members of a school district, have been on long term disability leave and have worked through or begun the reentry process. The sample population for this study consisted of nine teachers who have reentered the school system after being on LTD. The population came from the school districts in Alberta. The researcher communicated, personally or by letter, with officials in the Alberta School Employee Benefit Plan (ASEBP) and the Alberta Teachers' Association (ATA) outlining to them the name and basic purpose of my study and finally my name and contact numbers. The aim of the communication was to allow these organizations to be aware of the study so that if any members of these respective organizations inquired of these parent bodies, these organizations would be aware of my work. To obtain participants for the study, a letter was sent to school board officials, superintendents, employee assistance plan staff or personnel directors of school divisions outlining my study and asking them if they would be willing to notify teachers in their jurisdictions of the study. Also included with the letter was a brief one page description of the study which had on it the name and purpose of the study, information about confidentially and, finally, my name and contact numbers (Appendix A). Potential participants in the study contacted me by telephone to express their interest in taking part. Participants were then selected on the basis of gender, grade level taught, urban employment, had been or were on EDL and have begun the reentry process during or within the last five years. The sample used in the study consisted of nine teachers, five of whom were female and four were male. Six of the teachers taught at the elementary level, two at junior high and one at the high school level.

Data Collection

This study required use of several sources of data, including documents and interviews, to gather descriptions of the experience. However, the main source of data came from individual interviews. A sample interview guide is found in Appendix B. Participants were interviewed three times during the study. The first interview was about 60 minutes long. At this meeting, the purpose of the study was discussed and the Participant Consent Form read and signed by the participant (Appendix C). Once these issues were concluded, the interview guide served as the focus of this first meeting. As well, pertinent demographic information such as sex, age, grade level, years of teaching experience, education, and the reason for the LTD leave was gathered. The second meeting allowed the participant to review the interview transcript and make changes or validate it as it was. The third session occurred following data analysis and allowed the co-researcher to examine, discuss and validate the themes compiled by the researcher. This was done to ensure that the description of each co-researcher's experience was accurate. These sessions allowed for the development of increasing trust between the participants and the researcher and assisted the researcher in overcoming any personal distortions resulting from my biases (Patton, 1990; Sandelowski, 1986; Lincoln and Guba, 1985). Also several interviews with each co-researcher increased the validity by decreasing error of interpretation.

Efforts were made to search for and examine documents relating to the experiences of teachers returning to the school system after being on LTD. The ATA has published several documents relating to stress in the classroom as well as suggestions to improve teacher wellness. The researcher gathered information from the primary insurance company that underwrites teacher health insurance plans relating to his topic. Such documentation offered another source of data with which to research the topic and aided in establishing trustworthiness and rigor in the study.

The Journal

Data was also gathered in a journal kept by the researcher. The journal served several purposes (Bogdan and Biklen, 1992, pp. 120-123). Specifically, the journal provided a detailed description of the researchers, summaries of conversations and accounts of particular events. The journal also included reflections on the conversations, reflections on the method and insights generated through the research process. These ponderings often brought the researcher face to face with his own presuppositions. Writing in the journal allowed the researcher to more fully underst how necessary it is to acknowledge biases in order to arrive at a rich description of an experience.

The Journal also provided an opportunity to keep an audit trail. An audit trail provides information so that "any reader or another researcher can follow the progression of events in the study and understand their logic" (Sandelowski p. 34). Specifically, the audit trail includes information about activities conducted and the decisions made during the study that would allow the study to be replicated.

Data Analysis

As mentioned several times in the study, my goal is to uncover the themes of the return to work experience of teachers on EDL. Specifically, this study uses thematic analysis of the participants' descriptions of their experiences. This involves careful study of the descriptions provided by the participants and searching for common themes among these descriptions. In order to determine the themes I have used the procedural steps outlined by Colaizzi (1978).

The researcher listened to each of the participant's tapes and then proceeded to transcribe each interview tape verbatim. Upon completion of each transcription, the researcher read and reviewed the script for accuracy. Then it was given to each participant to review and where necessary to make changes. Any changes were then incorporated into a revised transcript and this revision became the interview that was analyzed in depth.

Upon completion of this review process, each interview was read several times to acquire an understanding of and feeling for the experiences each co- researcher has undergone. This allowed the researcher to become better acquainted with the study's participants.

Then each sentence and/or paragraph of an interview was read in detail with the aim of identifying significant statements. These meaning units provided information about the experience being revealed. These significant statements or meaning units were then paraphrased. Once the paraphrase was completed, it was coded in order to break down and examine the data further thus gathering essential points of each meaning unit and to prevent loss of information. Then a tag was assigned. Tags were one or two words that essentially summarized the key characteristic of the meaning unit. Tags were then grouped together according to commonality and from these groups, themes were developed (Appendices D and E). This process was conducted for each interview. The cluster of themes were then given to each participant for validation. Validation of the themes increases the credibility of the research findings.

The participant's experiences were then compared and it was found that the interviews contained many similar statements. As result, many of the same tags occurred over and over again. As the tags were grouped together, clusters of similar themes began to develop across the breath of the data. Using this approach, major themes were formulated along with subthemes. These were reviewed by another group of teachers who are or have been on EDL. Two members of this group had also taken part in this study. This review process gave further credibility to the findings. These findings were then used to provide a detailed description of the participants' return to work experience that is found in Chapter 4.

Journal Data

Entries in the journal were an important part the research process. As a result, they too were analyzed along with the transcripts All journal entries were read, significant statements paraphrased, coded and tagged. Clusters of themes were then developed from this analysis and some of those themes were similar to those of the participants' transcripts and thus provided further credibility to the findings.

Ethical Concerns

Prior to beginning the study, the researcher made an application to the Ethics Committee, Department of Educational Psychology, University of Alberta. The Ethics Committee approved the design of the study and the research was then undertaken.

The first concern was for each participant's welfare. Confidentiality was a prime consideration and was voiced as a concern by several of the study's participants. Upon collecting the data, each participant was given a code and names were not used. Any information that might identify the participants was removed from the study. In reporting the findings of the study, the real names of the subjects were not used.

Participants in the study were asked to sign a consent form which explained their right to withdraw from the study at any time, how their confidentiality was protected as well as their anonymity. Included in the consent form was information regarding the participant's permission granting me authorization to use the data collected from the study. A sample consent form is found in Appendix C. Asking participants to visit previous experiences perhaps causing emotional pain required sensitivity. They were given the option to leave the study and they would be encouraged to seek professional help. Also in dealing with documents, especially documents which were not be part of the public record such information from insurance companies and school boards, permission from these organizations was obtained before using any of the data contained in this dissertation.

Delimitations

The study was delimited to study participants who, as teachers in the province of Alberta, reentered or are reentering the classroom after being on EDL. The primary sources of data collection were interviews and documents.

The results of the study are delimited by the experience of each participant. However, it is expected from their collective experience would arise themes which would contribute to a understanding of the phenomenon.

Limitations of the Study

The results of the study are limited to the teachers who were interviewed. The description of the experience captured in the study was dependent upon the what the participants remembered and/or were willing to share with the researcher as well as their ability to put that experience into words.

The characteristics of the teachers also limited the results of the study. These teachers volunteered to take part in the study. Each teacher was a veteran educator having been engaged in teaching for at least 15 years.

In terms of location, the results of the study are limited. All of the participants were employed by large urban school divisions in the province of Alberta.

Another limitation is that eight out of nine teachers in the sample successfully made the transition from EDL to return to work. Successful transition meant going back to work for at least six months. Zachary, a study participant, tried twice but in both cases he had to go back on to EDL. However, even Zachary reported that he was going to try again and he has obtained greater success this time in that he has worked fulltime for almost 16 months.

A further limitation of the study was that its' participants were teachers who would consider their return to work to be generally positive.

Chapter 4

Results

This chapter traces the personal experience of nine teachers who were forced to leave their jobs due to ill health and then struggle back to regain their health and their careers. For each of the teachers, the experience is unique but there are similarities. Some of these teachers left their positions for different health reasons or stressors may have triggered their decision to leave. However, despite the uniqueness of their journeys, it is believed that these teachers shared similar experiences as they travelled the road to recovery and resumption of their careers. Analyzing the data revealed some similarities in their experiences and these themes are the focus of this chapter. Each teacher taking part in the study with one exception has returned to work either on a full time or part time basis for at least 6 months. One teacher has twice attempted unsuccessfully to return to teaching after being on EDL on two separate occasions.

The Participants

The participants in the study were four males and five females. There were representatives from Elementary, Junior High and High School. The teaching experience of these educators ranged from 15 to 28 years. After working with the participants for almost 18 months, the researcher cannot help but be grateful to the four men and five women for allowing him into their individual stories. As one of the co-researchers stated, "You probably know more about how I felt and still feel about what has happened to me than my husband." Such sharing was indeed a privilege.

Reasons for Leaving Work

Each of these teachers found themselves on EDL for different reasons and by reading their explanations, the researcher believes a better appreciation of the particular circumstances of each co researcher can be achieved.

> Melinda
>
> I had physical disability in the sense that my severe muscle weakness in my arms and legs and back in November, and I believe it was a just cumulative build up over time of a number of problems, and I saw the appropriate medical authorities and they gave me permission.
>
> Harold
>
> I was involved in a car accident which damaged my neck. I went back to work..... half days. Finally, the neck got so bad I had to take off completely.
>
> Dorothy
>
> I got stressed out and felt I couldn't cope. I found I was crying in the classroom at times when the kids weren't there; going home crying and I felt like I couldn't do it and yet I hated to give in, to say that was an awful thing to have to admit, where I couldn't go.

Semantha

I had realized that I had reached a point where I could no longer function, either professionally or personally and that's when I approached administration and shared with them that I felt the extracurricular load I was getting was something I wasn't physically capable of doing anymore, they ignored me. I then approached my doctor and on reviewing how I felt and the way things were in my life, she agreed that I could no longer continue teaching.

Alize

I didn't have any choice. I gradually came to be at the phase where everything was taking me an enormously long amount of time to do and something that normally would take me perhaps five minutes, I couldn't get finished in an hour, and I would take lot of work home and it would take me forever to do nothing very much. I was someone who was doing a variety of different jobs within one full time position. I basically didn't want to go to school and I just tried to work harder and harder. So I figured I could work through it, if I just put more time in I' d get through it. I basically couldn't carry on and couldn't think, couldn't concentrate, couldn't do anything and so I ended up seeing my doctor and she said I was suffering three things, from sinusitis (I developed allergies over the last five years) and also had burnout and depression.

Kassidy

I didn't know where the pain was coming from, the accidents or the injuries I'd incurred from the accidents and I was getting bruises. ...That's when I realized. I just actually had a complete physical collapse... and I didn't get up out of bed for about three weeks....

Samuel

Because I crashed, I burned out on the job and burnout is a different thing for different people. In my case, it was depression, I found myself mentally going to pieces right in front of my own eyes and I knew I was in trouble and I sought help right away and I was told, you've got depression, you need to take some time off and I acted on that advice.

Jerome

I got to a point in a day in a school where a particular set of circumstances occurred which, kind of, were the last straw and I just said that this is nuts. I can't work under these kind of conditions, and I can't, I can't function in an atmosphere which I don't consider, you know, is respectful. So I, I had an appointment that evening with a doctor. I got an appointment with him and I said I can't go back. ... I'm going to fall apart if I do. I'd been seeing him for a long period of time already, and I think he had a pretty good idea of what was going on and so he gave me a letter and

> that's how, you know, indicating I would not be able to work and that's how I got started on LTD.
>
> Zachary
>
> Each day I think is taking its little bit of its toll and I just got to the point where I found I wasn't functioning the way that I wanted to function in the classroom and, you know, the only alternative at that point was to simply remove myself from that situation.

The second time that Zachary went back, he lasted from September until after Christmas.

> When I returned on the very first day back after Christmas Break, I just kind of froze, I couldn't go back into the classroom ... luckily enough my supervisor, administrator, principal of the school was coming, walking down the hallway at the time and so he sort of just took me into his office and we started damage control.

From the experiences of the above teachers, the decision to go on EDL was complex. These were previously healthy people who saw themselves falling apart before their very eyes. They continued to try those things that had worked for them in past like work more and work harder. However, this time, these remedies didn't bring relief. For some there was a growing sense of despair brought on by not knowing what was wrong and by not being able to cope with those things as that they had in the past. The real source of their health problems had been the accumulation of many things in their lives that had eventually taken its toll. There was a realization by these teachers that they had to do something but for some of them this also posed a dilemma. To give in was to admit that there was problem, yet by not giving in the problem had the potential to get worse. Each of these participants continued to work despite the depression, the exhaustion, the physical injury or the burnout. However, despite their valiant attempts to continue, there came a particular point where they could offer nothing more and could go no further. At that point, they sought help and thus began a process which resulted in their leaving the classroom, going on Short Term Leave and then on Extended Disability Leave.

Analysis of the participants' descriptions revealed three major themes and several subthemes which were common to their respective experiences. The main themes were the Recovery Process, the Reentry Experience and Reentry Issues. These themes along with their subthemes are presented in Table 4-1.

Table 4-1

Themes Arising from the Analysis

Theme 1. The Recovery Process	
Subtheme 1.1	Seeking professional help
Subtheme 1.2	Supporting relationships in recovering health.
Subtheme 1.3	Educating self
Subtheme 1.4	Challenging personal beliefs
Theme 2. The Reentry Experience	
Subtheme 2.1	Deciding to return to work
Subtheme 2.2	Working full time may not be an option
Subtheme 2.3	Enduring intense feelings
Subtheme 2.4	Supporting relationships of colleagues
Subtheme 2.5	The teacher-administrator relationship
Subtheme 2.6	Watching your health
Subtheme 2.7	Reacting to reentry experiences
Theme 3. Reentry Issues	
Subtheme 3.1	Advising teachers
Subtheme 3.2	Advising school boards
Subtheme 3.3	Using the Extended Disability Package
Subtheme 3.4	Joining support groups

Theme 1

The Recovery Process

As the participants described their experiences in their respective recoveries, several similarities were discovered by the researcher. Teachers seeking professional help; supportive relationships in recovering health; educating self about their health problems and seeking solutions and challenging of personal beliefs and philosophy were subthemes that emerged upon analysis of the data.

Subtheme 1.1 Seeking Professional Help

When a person is ill, the first place he/she often turns to is his/her family physician for advice. Each of the participants, in fact, did. Each sought help from either the medical and /or psychological community. Melinda, for example, related seeing a health team that consisted of her family doctor, a specialist recommended by her physician and a psychologist who specialized in pain management. Melinda expressed having a difficult time in the beginning leaving the house. This is not uncommon for many teachers who are on leave especially for those who do not look physically sick.

> When I started going out to the mall to do my walking I spent a lot of time in my head preparing responses to people who might say why are you here in the middle of the day and it took me three or four months to stop.

She attributed to her psychologist her ability to move beyond this isolation by helping her to realize that what she was thinking; others probably were not thinking at all.

Samuel also had a health care team that consisted of his doctor, his psychologist, and his psychiatrist. Samuel took advantage of group psychotherapy programs offered in the community as well as weekly individual sessions with his therapist. For him, it was counselling and biofeedback; biofeedback for relaxation and stress reduction, and counselling for understanding his situation. He also related that

> I'm also seeing a psychiatrist, but not nearly as often and ... with him it's only every few months and it's primarily because, well, a psychologist can't write a prescription and I'm on anti depressants still and I need him on my team, ... although I could get anti depressants from my own doctor. It's not a big deal that way but I would just as soon keep the contact with this man, for now. My wife and family of course, who were probably my greatest support and source of help throughout the process from start to finish, um, the psychologist that I'm still seeing ... in that order.

Dorothy also went for counselling and used the services of her physician who recommended "Get out and walk for 15 minutes a day, and I religiously, that's all I did for the first two or three months was gear myself up for a walk per day, that's all I did."

Alize's also visited her doctor. Her physician suggested taking medication and seeing a psychologist. She stated that her doctor's advice to her was:

> Just do things that gave me joy. That was it. That was all I was to do, because at that time I couldn't feel anything. I had no sense of joy, happiness, anything. So I was very full of despair to start with because I was put on medication and that didn't work. Then my doctor suggested that perhaps I go on lithium as well as my anti-depressant ... gradually after another two or three months I seemed to be feeling better. It took a long time.

Alize's visits to her psychologist helped her in several ways. She reported that her psychologist

> emphasized that I was not to be staying at home between nine and four because I thought I should be. I was always trying to, well, what can I do to help me get better quickly and it was being emphasized to me that I should just relax and feel what I feel.

Harold was on a great deal of medication during his recovery period. As he stated "there was a span of probably about a year and a half maybe two years which are really sort of blank time."

Semantha stated, "I see the doctor every two weeks and I see the psychologist every week."

Jerome also reported seeing his family doctor, a psychiatrist and a psychologist.

> My personal doctor, my family doctor, the help he gave me

> was first of all, he's kind of an unusual doctor, he has been involved in alternative forms of medicine for a long period of time. He was always a good source of ideas and information about what I might be able to look at and do. He is also very quick to listen to the patient rather than make up his own mind about what you're up to.

In discussing his psychiatrist, he stated that he still sees him and that he is very empathetic and helpful. However, in regard to his first psychologist, Jerome felt that together they had just run out of ideas. In his words:

> She had a very, was almost like a formula approach to solving a problem. So we went through all these different things but in the end, she would just basically say so how are you going to handle this and basically I'm saying I don't know what I can do to handle this and she would say well, you know, you have to find something for yourself. Well, okay, maybe but I don't know when I couldn't find out what that was, I didn't really consider that to be the most valuable information but then again I realize that there are limitations to what they can do.

Zachary was one teacher who had tried twice to go back to work from EDB leave and both times was unsuccessful. He related that the first time that he was off he sought help from his family doctor and a psychiatrist that was recommended by some teacher colleagues.

The psychiatrist started treating him

> through a process of both treating it through, you know, through ...medical, pharmaceuticals, through drugs to address the so called neurotransmitter deficiency or imbalances and what not and a certain amount of talk therapy from him. I guess I felt that in time I was able to sort of come to grips with it. The second reentry, the Employee Assistance Program was very helpful, extremely helpful ... I got involved in one on one ...psychological counselling and then also was involved in group project or a group counselling program too which wasn't quite as helpful as the one to one. I am still continuing the one to one right now.

In summary the helping professions assisted the participants in many ways. The medical profession aided these teachers by helping them to discover what was wrong through various diagnostic procedures, providing them with medication and, at times, counselling them. As well, the medical personnel completed portions of the various reports needed by the insurance companies so that these teachers would be granted EDL. They also provided referrals to psychiatrists as necessary and encouraged the teachers to contact psychologists. For the majority of the teachers, their individual sessions with the psychologists opened an examination of such issues such as isolation and the need to venture out of the home as part of the recovery process. When able to return to work, several of these teachers felt the need to continue with the services of their various professional care givers because being back at work does not necessarily mean being totally recovered.

Subtheme 1.2 Supporting Relationships in Recovering Health

Isolation is one of the themes that does appear in the literature. Isolation occurs as a result of the loss of contact with colleagues due to not being at work. The loss of contact may be the result of a desire by the teacher to have little or nothing to do with those with whom he/she may have worked. It could result from fellow employees not knowing what to do or say to a teacher who is on disability leave or it could also be a combination of both reasons. In the cases of several of the study's participants, isolation was indeed a condition that they had to endure.

Melinda recounted that in the beginning there was regular communication with other staff members but as time went on that diminished and "you get a real sense of isolation, you know." In her case, the principal "checked with me periodically to see how things were going." Zachary felt somewhat isolated because of his own personal situation. He maintained that when teachers go off on leave: "they have at least realized that there is something wrong but they can get stuck in that next sort of just isolation and not move from there, literally hide away from the rest of the world and unless there is a hand reaching out to them they could stay there for a very long time."

Semantha was worried about being cut off from her school. She had a role in hiring her substitute teacher and, as best she could, maintained contact with her and helped in the lesson planning. Semantha believed maintaining contact was important because "if you've isolated yourself from the people you work with, and there are a lot of people who are already resentful that you're getting paid and getting time off, and you look fine. ... I imagine that if you cut yourself off, it would be really hard to go back." She was determined to maintain as much contact as she reasonably could.

Despite the isolation felt by some of the study's participants, it was supportive relationships of friends and family that was of significance. For example, Semantha received such support from her husband and family as well as from friends.

> Prior to going off on sick leave, there were two or three teachers who I didn't know well but who had good friends or family members go through long term disability. They were very supportive, and, it wasn't constant but it would be a little card in the mailbox or to pat my shoulder when I walked by or say, you know, how are you doing. I know it's rough for you right now, are you doing okay?.

When Semantha left, she received, at Christmas time, poems from a couple of kids and she stated that it was just phenomenal. In regard to home, she was thankful for the support she got.

> I think the support I got from home, I think in many other relationships that I know, we probably would have been divorced, my husband would have walked out on me and said,

> you're so screwed up with you job; just, I'm out of here. For two or three years he did everything, did all the shopping, grocery shopping, prepared all the meals and did 90% of the housework cause I wasn't there, I was at school seven days a week. I think another person might have issued ultimatums to me. So I think having the support at home. I've got two daughters who say they'll never be teachers and that's kind of sad because they could have been good teachers but they're seeing the writing on the wall and saying if that's what's being a teacher really means, I don't want to do that. I want to have a life.

Alize noted that she, despite her illness, did attempt to remain in contact with her friends and some of her colleagues. She stated that despite her fears, she returned to the school for a Christmas party and wound up receiving cards from the children and the teaching staff. After Christmas, Alize wanted to go back to teaching and did attempt to do so. However, she quickly discovered that she was not well enough. As she recalled her second day back she remembered:

> A little girl came down to me and she had a box and she gave me this little box and on it, in huge letters, a beautifully decorated ... two colours, welcome. And I opened up this box and inside was a pair of earrings she'd made with her jewelry set ... and so I said that's absolutely wonderful. Thank You, I have to go and put them on and I said that's wonderful. I

> found that so amazing.

She also reported meeting with colleagues, as she could, to discuss education issues. She recalled:

> It probably was a good experience and you do get amazing cards from people, you know, saying you've been a touch stone for me and made a big difference, you've been my, I don't know, idol's not quite the right word and you know, you realize what a big difference you've made to my life.

Zachary mentioned that friends also made a difference in him recovering his health. To him friends were invaluable because they allowed him to share, to talk and they accepted him. To him this was particularly important because:

> I did have difficulty with the immediate family. My spouse in particular ... has had and still has a certain amount of difficulty with trying to accept the whole thing as to what happened so that, that's difficult and so if it wasn't for the network or support I was getting elsewhere, I don't know I think my, probably things would have gotten worse rather then better.

Melinda also experienced some difficulty with her family when she went on sick leave. She reported that her parents had health problems and she tended to keep her own problems to herself or share with friends. She stated that perhaps they were not that supportive and attributed this in part to the way she was brought up. Her brother in law she stated said, "Well, the longer she is off the harder it is going to be to go back and so there's that but that's been the only inkling of, you know, pressure from them, you know, to get back to work." By contrast, she found that at least to her face, her neighbours, friends, colleagues and parents of her students whom she met, were supportive. However, she felt the thing that was most important to her was her psychologist. "She's, you know, for me to make that step of even going cause I always could handle my own problems but to admit that I needed someone to help me was a big step and she's very helpful and very nonjudgemental."

Dorothy found that her family were not all that supportive when she went on leave and "in absolute disbelief that I would take time off because I was feeling stressed." She reported them saying to her "Don't be silly, just buckle in and do with it, and didn't realize how serious it was." Her physician, she stated, finally was able to convince her mother of the seriousness of her illness.

To summarize, teachers going on EDL, in the beginning, found that some members of their staff kept in contact with them for awhile. However, that contact was soon discontinued. Isolation often soon crept into their lives and as Zachary observed that, "unless there is a hand reaching out to them they could stay isolated for a very long time". These participants sought support and received it from various sources. The support often took the form of having someone to talk to, being accepted, receiving cards or letters from students and other teachers, and meeting with colleagues at places other than school. The family for some of the teachers was an immense source of support, for others, the opposite was true. Having support meant that you were not forgotten. Often it was the time taken by others to do things for the co-researchers that showed them and that made them feel how much they were appreciated

Subtheme 1.3 Educating Self

One should not be surprised to find that many of the teachers who participated in this study spent considerable time trying to find information about what was wrong with them and looking for different things to help alleviate their conditions. The self education referred to here is not relegated to that provided by their health care professionals but rather this process took the form of discussions with friends and colleagues as well as an extensive amount of reading.

Samuel reported doing a lot of reading on depression and reaching out to anyone who could "throw light on this thing for me and to give me some sense of what had happened to me and why and what I could do about it and arming myself with that information, that understanding, is the main thing I did in order to prepare to go back to work."

Dorothy stated that she read a lot of books on stress and listened to a lot of tapes. "Bradshaw's *The Homecoming*... gave me a little more insight into my family life and why I'm sort of like I am. I just listened to a great deal of things and read a lot. That helped me and then my counselling was good too. It made me face some of my problems."

Alize started reading books on health prior to taking leave. She stated that she reported feeling unhappy and this became the rationale for her reading. She followed one suggestion of exercise and she incorporated it into her routine. She stated that she felt a little better but in the end felt that her exercise wasn't enough to prevent her from going on leave. She also reported reading a series of articles in the paper on depression which she felt were very helpful. Alize also read several books, two of which she found helpful. These were *Just Getting Up When You're Feeling Down* and *Anger Kills*. Her interest in these books and others was her desire to seek an understanding of depression and the way it affected her.

Melinda also read a lot while she was off work. For example, she recalled reading *Living With it Daily*, a book about people dealing with chronic pain and she found its daily readings...."were written for me." *From Panic to Power* by Lousenta Bassett was another book that she read.

> I read this book, its, you know, you read it and you know you are not the only one and there is nothing wrong with being anxious like it's not a mental illness, it's just you know an emotional disorder and it's what led to my physical downfall, or one of the factors that led to my physical downfall so those readings have been very helpful.

Jerome tried to solicit information about "relaxation techniques, and trying to get an understanding of how stress works and stuff like that. So those things were a help to me. But nobody provided them for me; I did those on my own."

To conclude, being educators it is not surprising that the co-researchers searched to find answers to questions they had about their illnesses. The sources of these answers were often friends, colleagues and an extensive amount of personal reading. Several of the co-researchers felt a strong need to come to an understanding of specific maladies such as burnout and depression that had so changed their lives. They also searched for assistance to lessen the effects of their illness such as exercise and relaxation. As they searched for explanations, the participants discovered that they were not alone, others had been where they were and had fought back.

Subtheme 1.4 Challenging Personal Beliefs

As we live our lives we adopt certain beliefs that become so important we build our lives around them. However, as a people who are ill and begin to reflect on their lives, they may indeed begin to question whether or not these beliefs have served them well. Almost all co researchers have had to come face to face with their own personal beliefs during their recovery processes.

Semantha, for example, during the time she was off, had to come to grips with her own personal beliefs about the nature of teaching. Prior to her illness she worked long and hard at the school, doing many things of an extracurricular nature as well as teaching. She was a team player and for a long time proud of that fact. Her recovery has forced her to examine the wisdom of this belief. Semantha made certain choices about what she does with her time now. "Before, I made an effort to be congenial with everyone. I thought it was very important to be a team player, a large team but a team. I don't waste my time anymore, which does isolate in certain ways but it's called survival. My energy goes into my teaching."

Samuel also found himself adjusting his attitude towards teaching.

> As you know, being an educator, it's a classic educator's mistake to put yourself last, to meet everyone's needs but your own, to give and give and give and not worry about any get, just give and give. I made that mistake and I was, I came out empty. So I resolve to do what I could do to look after myself more, or to perhaps look after myself for the first time upon going back to school. I tried to do things like run through scenarios of how can I make this job experience easier on me. It wasn't so much how could I do less, although in some cases that's how it worked out but how can I make this thing easier to take whereas in the past I've always thought, you know, what can a guy, you know, I can do this, I can do that. Here's something else I could do, this would be good for the kids. I put a lot of that kind of thinking aside and got more in line with how can I meet everyone's needs here, including my own. How can I do the job that has to be done and still have me be in reasonably good shape.

Zachary mentioned, several times in his interview, a loss of purpose once he had to go on sick leave. Zachary taught for many years and then, over time, got more involved in educational activities outside the classroom. In that capacity, his role from that of a classroom teacher changed significantly and he found it was a role that he enjoyed. However, when he had to return to the classroom, he found the transition to be very difficult. While he was on leave, his search was again to find purpose in his life. He found purpose with his involvement in a group that works with teachers who are on EDL.

> I'm extremely proud of the work that we are doing and really if it wasn't for it, I mean it gave me meaning, it gave me purpose again, allowed me to work with my colleagues further and also to utilize connections that I had before. Without it, its the major thing, the one major thing that kind of is a well spring from that and I was involved from the very first day in that and I no matter what I do in the future I, I plan to remain involved with it and hopefully to see that it continues...

It would appear that by helping others with their recovery, Zachary was helping himself at the same time.

Melinda's challenge was to recognize that she was ill despite the fact that she did not look it. In the beginning this interfered with her rehabilitation because of her own personal fears about what others may be thinking about her. She commented that,

> I don't look sick and I had and I've always been brought up

> that you know you have to be pretty darn sick to miss church or to miss school or to miss work and when I started going out to the mall to do my walking I spent a lot of time in my head preparing responses to people who might say, "Why are you here in the middle of the day?"

Through help from her psychologist, she was able to put these beliefs in perspective and carry out this part of her rehabilitation in a more relaxed manner.

When Alize went out on sick leave, it was her intention to return to work as soon as possible. As a result, she attempted to go back after being off of work for about three months because she felt that she was ready. Her initial reaction was surprise, horror, that she couldn't carry on making progress towards a full time reentry. "So after starting back, I couldn't progress. I thought if you wanted to do something you could do it because I always had been able to do things and I just had to accept that I would have to go more slowly." That required her to rethink her situation and as she recounted:

> we had to really back off from that and we, because we knew I wasn't going to be in the same role, we eased off from what I was doing in the classroom. ... I would now focus on getting ideas for the Grade.

One of more difficult things that Kassidy had to wrestle with was the acceptance of her illness. She reported that she had come from a very strong family who despite their lifestyle stayed strong and healthy for many years. As she stated, "I didn't come from a heritage of people that I would expect in my 40s to be incapacitated and I have always lived a healthy lifestyle."

In summary, personal beliefs, at times, can be unrealistic and have to be challenged and altered in order for growth to occur. The co-researchers during their recovery process found themselves questioning parts of their belief systems. These included their ideas regarding their role in teaching. Rather then being everything to everybody, some of the teachers realized that they could no longer do this. Besides looking at other's needs, there was a need to satisfy their own needs and design a plan to do this. As well, some of the teachers found it extremely difficult to accept their own illnesses as well as the fact that it was going to take time to recover.

Theme 2

The Reentry Experience

Probably the decision to go back to work is just as difficult, if not more difficult, than the decision to take extended disability leave. For those on leave the decision to go back is one that is weighed very carefully. The participants spoke candidly about how their decision was made to go back to work, their need for flexibility of employment options and the intense feelings they felt as they went back. As well, they discussed the importance of the supportive nature of their colleagues, the teacher-administrator relationship, the need to be ever mindful of their health and, finally, the generally positive nature of their return to work experience.

Subtheme 2.1 Deciding to Return to Work

Each teacher in the study, as his/her recovery processes continued, had to make an individual decision as to whether or not he/she were going to go back to work. Each of the participants expressed a desire to return to work and all, except for Zachary were successful. Once the decision is made, the process of leaving home and going back to work is not as simple as may be thought. In all cases the decision was not made in isolation but conjunction with their health care professionals.

Harold's injury was thought to be permanent by some of the doctors and the decision to go back to work "was more of an attempt to see if I could do it or not."

Semantha's case was somewhat different. She felt she was not ready to go back to work but her doctor felt that she was. "Once the doctor had stated that I was fit to return to work part-time, I was, end of discussion. In hindsight perhaps I would have fought harder with her." One of Semantha's biggest concerns was loss of income. She feared not being able to find a placement for herself if she went back after May 15 and, as a result, she would lose her income, her disability benefits, until she found a placement in September. The doctor's decision, "I didn't see as supportive but this particular doctor and she's very good in many other ways said that wasn't her problem. Legally, if she felt that the teacher was fit to be in the classroom that's what she'd say." Semantha had great difficulty understanding her doctor's rationale and the fear of losing her income was paramount.

Jerome related that he tried to forecast his own recovery, something which in the end was a mistake. This forecasting led him to believe that he would be ready to go back to work in September and he made commitments accordingly to his school board. "September came and I wasn't ready at all. I had said to my family doctor, I don't know if this is a good idea but I'd already committed myself and I said well let's face it I'm not going to know any better if I don't. So let's give it a try. So I went back."

Similarly, Alize attempted to predict her own recovery time and was mistaken. Her first decision to go back had to be changed because she quickly found that she was not ready. "Initially I felt I'd be going back in November then okay it was going to be after Christmas...she (my doctor) said it hasn't been long, for some people it's quite a long time." However, after being off for several more months she felt she was ready to return.

Samuel got to a point in his recovery where he felt he could cope if he did go back. "I felt reasonably confident in myself. Whether or not I felt confident about being able to do the job well, I felt confident enough that I was integrated enough and together enough that I could at least give it a shot, but I was by no means fearless and fully confident going into it. I had some reservations."

In conclusion, the decisions to return to work were arrived at in consultation with their respective physicians. Some teachers felt they were ready to go back. Others did not but in the opinion of their physicians they were ready and had to try.

Subtheme 2.2 Working Fulltime May Not Be An Option

One of the concerns expressed by some teachers was the lack of flexibility by school boards in taking teachers back from EDL on a part time basis. The boards who employed the study's participants extended some flexibility of placement for these teachers. For example, Samuel, Kassidy and Dorothy went back to work full time and felt that they were able to handle that commitment. Alize related that in the beginning, she was offered .2 or .3 workload upon her return, "not very much and I couldn't see doing as little as that because if I was ready to be the classroom teacher I thought I needed to do more and so I thought I probably could do the four days." Semantha worked approximately .6 time; Harold, Melinda and Zachary .5 time respectively and Jerome approximately .3 time. Prior to returning, Alize and Samuel took advantage of accommodation employment while on EDL and volunteered in the school for several months prior to returning to work.

The eventual hope of each teacher was to work full time. However, at least in the beginning, for some, this was not thought to be practical or healthy. As a result, six went back to part time teaching positions.

Subtheme 2.3 Enduring Intense Feelings

One of the most common elements in the return to work experience is the intensity of the feelings felt by the teachers as they returned. Perhaps such an intensity is to be expected due to the emotionality experienced by the teachers when they left and when they were recovering. Alize went back to the school where she was prior to going on EDL. The mixture of feelings held by Alize was typical. "Well, actually I think a mixture of feelings I think there indeed was some terror because I was frightened. Actually it was quite interesting because I'd always enjoyed being a classroom teacher." Samuel reported, "some anxiety, some trepidation about it, some fear of the unknown." However, once back at his old school, he stated that:

> It felt like it was nice to be back but, yeah, it felt very familiar, everything looked very much the same. I felt a little bit out of place, a little, I don't know what the word is, a little disassociated or a little bit as though I'm sort of a stranger. That feeling quickly disappeared because everyone was real nice to me and I had swarms of kids crowding around me.

Dorothy recounted experiencing a great deal of fear about going back to work, a fear based upon her previous experience at another school. She wanted a grade in which she was comfortable. "I was going into an unknown grade and school and so I just kind of was ready for it and if it didn't work, I knew I couldn't go back out." Once Dorothy did go back she found herself, "excited at first, actually, for about the first two or three weeks, until I could see what was going on in that building and then I was a little apprehensive but there was another teacher who came forward and kind of buddied me."

Semantha went back to work during the second semester and took over from her substitute. She related that she was worried "about response of my colleagues. Some of them just wouldn't understand and I found that, for the most part, the staff had ignored me when I was absent. ... I had been on staff, at that time, for eight years." She also reported being terrified of her first day back in class and she stated that she told everyone. She also related how she used her first classroom opportunity to discuss her feelings with her class. She related that "I was very honest from the first day and most of the kids were very appreciative of that so they responded in kind." In the end she found herself being more uncomfortable with the students than the staff and her rationale for that was, "I know how many students don't like change like that, in the middle of a course, they get really upset."

Melinda returned to her old school and reported being comfortable with that. However, one of her main concerns was that she might not be strong enough to cope and this was based "on other people's experiences about reentry." She also reported feeling a little apprehensive:

> Although I had been at that school for quite a number of years, just wondering about how people would react to me being back, knowing that I had been teaching for a long time. You really don't know how much people know, except what you told and probably people had different ideas as to why I was

> gone. So I just wondered how I would be received. I was concerned, I wanted to be treated the same as everybody else but I also wanted them to understand that I was still in recovery and yet I didn't want to be ... pampered either. ... When I first started back I wondered whether some people would be angry that I left whether even if you go away for health reasons, ... some people don't like that you left. So, I had already been dealing with that myself. You feel guilty yourself. But on the whole, it was good.

When Jerome went back, he decided to take an elementary position instead of a junior high assignment. In the beginning he reported looking forward to job, however, he quickly became frightened. Part of this fear he stated "I didn't want to be getting myself in a position where someone could be critical of me." Jerome was fearful of being evaluated at a time in his life when he felt extremely vulnerable. Perhaps another reason for his fear was:

> In September I found I was getting pretty tired and pretty frazzled like confused and dazed and stunned and I' d be going by the school and I'd be worried about whether I could actually drive properly which bothered me because of course at the end of the almost a year off I felt pretty doggone good. I felt as good as I ever felt. So, I didn't like that immediate set back. I ...started to kind of table off towards November and December.. It got not bad, I got kind a re acclimatized.

Zachary related how the first time was terrifying and how it was one of the most difficult things he has had to deal with. The second exit he stated "was almost a little more insidious because here I was back after Christmas Holiday Break and it just suddenly hit me and neither one the reenteries were pleasant in terms of that. I am in the process of reentry again right now."

Harold, who went back to his old school, remarked that in his case that the majority of the staff were glad to see him back. He stated that "for me it was just sort of like something you had to do. It's something you have to face. At some point in time you've got to try. If you can go, you go, if you can't, then you tried."

Kassidy maintained that her experience was not pleasant. Prior to going back to work she had to go for a job interview with a prospective school administrator. She stated this experience itself was filled with terror for her. The terror, in part resulted from the fact that she believed that the new administration team probably knew about her the contents of her personnel file and her belief that "someone else might be able to afford to make a mistake but I never could." She described the interview as civil but she felt the administrator was suspicious and fearful of being stuck with a "pig in a poke." She also maintained that her fear resulted from the fact that she had to go back because she could not afford not to, either professionally or financially.

In review, the teachers upon deciding to reenter the classroom initially experienced a mixture of feelings. For many, it was at first feelings of terror, fright, trepidation and guilt. These feelings arose due to concerns about the unknown, that is how they themselves would personally act once at school and teaching and for several, there was the anxiety created by being in new schools and classroom situations. As well, some worried of how they would be received by fellow colleagues and perhaps having to face the possibility of teacher evaluations. Each one knew that at one time they would have to try to go back, however, as one teacher stated she had to go back and be successful because she could not afford to, either professionally or financially. Perhaps for all the participants this was a underlying reality they believed they faced. This belief alone could account for a much of teachers' emotionality.

Subtheme 2.4 Supporting Relationships of Colleagues

One of the most important aspects mentioned by each of the co researchers that had a positive impact on their return to work was the support they received from colleagues once they returned to work. This support came in many forms. In many cases it was unsolicited, but it helped in the transition to working after coming off EDL either fully or partially.

Kassidy despite her fearful beginnings, found the school, where she eventually was employed, had a staff that was extremely supportive. She noted that everyone in her new school had been helpful to her. Specifically, she noted that other teachers shared materials with her, had grade meetings together, her teaching partner helped her redo her timetable, the staff got along well and seemed to care about each other. Overall, she described the atmosphere in the school as being " very pleasant, and very up beat and very supportive." She went on to say that, "it was a collegiality that I had not experienced for a long time."

Harold found his staff supportive of him as well. His support, he related, came in the way of encouragement and himself knowing that he was part of a team. Melinda wondered whether or not the staff had gotten together prior to her coming back. She felt that she "was well received" by her staff.

Dorothy also described getting the support of a co-worker when she went back. She stated that this teacher taught the same grade and that whenever the other teacher ran off something for her class she ran off extras for Dorothy's class. She also reported that they co-planned together and that "there were a lot of things in that school ... that were not good. I guess we kind of banded together." ... "We would kind of bitch to each other and that helped a lot, just to be able to unload and say, My God what the heck is that guy doing, ..." Dorothy credited her buddy for making it easier for her to remain at work. In her own words, "I don't think that I would have lasted that first year if it hadn't been for this buddy. And then I kind of stuck it out because of her knowing that I had a real good relationship with her, working relationship."

Zachary described experiences of support as being similar to those that would be given to a new teacher on staff. He stated:

> I was accepted very readily. I felt that I kinda ... I melded into

> the staff quite readily but it is still what is going on inside of you. I mean that some of that, I won't call it a facade, but its your external appearance and whereas inside of you still may be feeling some of the anxieties, and what not, that you had before. You had the odd students, of course, but you are going to get those regardless ... but I can't honestly say there was anyone at the school who was not helpful.

In spite of the support that Zachary stated that he received, it was not enough to allow him to resume his career at that time.

Jerome found support in the fact that the staff were all nice and worked very hard. According to Jerome, they were basically very nice people. Specifically, he stated, "There were a couple of people who had gone on EDL before including the lady who I shared a class with and this helped."

Like the other teachers, Alize also found strong support, not only from other teachers, but in her particular case some of the parents of her students. Alize stated that another teacher who taught next to her had also been on EDL for depression. "She was also on the same medication as me which is very interesting so we sort of semi-bonded and her room happens to be just by mine so we usually chat on the way in and on the way out for sure which was very nice." As Alize was working four days a week, she managed to get her substitute teacher to teach her off day. Alize reported this being helpful because they could bounce ideas off of each other and "what a good strategy might be and

that was very, very comforting for me and I really really needed that because sometimes you're not sure of your own judgment. She was very encouraging because she's that kind of person, very supportive."
Alize also found that her friends in other schools were glad to help her. "They really did put themselves out and other people confided a lot of things in me like and perhaps a couple of them had been through something similar and it was how they had worked things out."

Samuel stated that "several of his colleagues, not all of them, ... said we're glad to see you back." Their offers of help were present but not specific but as he related he "was very grateful for all those gestures." Samuel's wife encouraged him to talk about his depression and he did this at work with another man who also suffered from depression. In her opinion, Samuel was able to bond,

> Should we say and compare notes and I think that too was very helpful, because they were able to get into what they both had in a deeper way, more meaningful way. So, and when you explain what you have and why you have it, people tend to be more helpful, more interested, more understanding. Teachers, in that way, were very very supportive.

Semantha felt that the support she received from her school was not universal and that her fellow teachers contributed to this. Her doctor had advised in writing that she not be involved in any extracurricular activities at the school. When this became an issue she had a friend who was a counsellor at the school and Semantha would go to her and say, "Will you talk to someone because I don't think I should have to keep saying no and justify myself. And she would do that." The helpful teachers, she felt, were the ones "who felt as I did, overwhelmed by a lot of things." However, she felt that some of those people were afraid of her because "but for the grace of God will be me next year. The people who were very sure of themselves and weren't afraid to be themselves and were confident in their teaching and in their personal life were the ones who were helpful."

Semantha stated that the least helpful people were some of the teaching staff and support staff. In Semantha's opinion "the ones who had insecurities, and I think we can see who they are by the way they treat the staff members, and students and everything, didn't offer anything" were the least helpful. She also made an interesting point, that in her school, only those teachers who went out on leave due to physical illnesses got acknowledged by the school's wellness committee.

In summary, the majority of the participants found their colleagues supportive upon their return to work. This support they felt helpful and welcome as they were making the transition from EDL to work. This support came in various forms including sharing materials, being received positively by staffs, developing of working relationships that for some became friendships and working with people who themselves had been on EDL. This support would in time help to allay their fears and worries and ease the transition to return to work However, as noted by one teacher, there are still colleagues who offer no assistance.

Subtheme 2.5 The Teacher-Administrator Relationship

The principal is the administrative head of the local school and is responsible for its efficient operation. The principal's major goal is to provide the best instruction possible for the students in the school and he/she achieves this function through the work of his /her teachers. The principal is not selected by the teachers but more likely appointed by the school board after a selection process. Due to the powerful influence of the principal in a school, it is not surprising the relationship that a teacher feels he/she has or develops in the school as he/she begins the adventure of going back to work has the potential to colour this back to work experience. This was indeed the case with each teacher who participated in this study.

Samuel, for example, believed that "one of the best things that happened upon returning was to find out that we had a new principal in the school." He stated that he believed his previous principal contributed in large measure to his burnout. He related "the fact that we had a new principal was good news although I still didn't know if it would necessarily be an improvement. So I thought, oh my God, at least she's different but what if she's another one like the last one." Samuel related that the new principal met with him and offered her assistance and encouragement. As far as he was concerned this new principal was "great and I'm very happy to be working with her, but that was one of the key issues around returning for me."

Melinda had talked to the principal of her school several times prior to coming back. She was assured by the principal that, upon her return, Melinda was in the driver's seat in regard to her return to work. Melinda reported being somewhat skeptical but was pleased when the principal allowed her to incorporate her own personal health goals as part of her growth plan.

Jerome was extremely concerned with her relationship with the administration upon his return. He had, at times during his career, found his relationships with administrations strained. In the new school, he deemed himself in a sense lucky to be at a school "where I knew this fellow and I got along with him on a kind of casual level quite well." Even this casual relationship he believed to be significant because as he stated "we got along very well and so it was a very good year from the viewpoint of my interaction with school administration which was a really big concern of mine."

Kassidy, even before going into her new school was fearful of the administration because she felt it may be a repeat of the last. However, her experience at this new school alleviated her fears. She stated that she was being complimented for the very things she was criticized for at her old school. " The administration is very complimentary. I've had to choke back the tears a couple of times when they have come in and made some comment about...that's a wonderful project or something." This contrast in administrative styles, in her mind, has contributed positively to her return.

Harold felt that, in his case, the administration team could have been more supportive. He particularly questioned their failure to reconstruct a timetable that would more reflect his needs. "They did not see fit to construct a timetable which would make it easier for me to teach more like physically a half-day versus half of my teaching schedule." Essentially, Harold's time table did not allow him the flexibility of just teaching in the morning or afternoons. At times, he could find himself at school all day and yet only be teaching a few periods.

Dorothy found that at her new school the principal had his favourite teachers and that he rewarded them accordingly. She asserted that this became apparent within three weeks of her returning to work. As mentioned earlier, Dorothy stated that having a teacher buddy whom she could talk to helped her to get through this predicament.

Alize's case was somewhat different than Dorothy's. Alize found her principal to be supportive of her from the beginning. As she recounted, her principal phoned her from time to time while she was out and encouraged her to take the time she needed to get better. When it became apparent that she would not go back to her former position, Alize was allowed to choose her own grade as well as keep her substitute for the day she would be away. It would appear that these supportive acts by the principal helped Alize's return to be smoother than it otherwise could have been.

Semantha, as reported earlier, explained that upon her return, when she felt that when the administration's requests were unreasonable, she would call upon her friend, the school counsellor, to talk on her behalf. Semantha maintained that the return to work experience for a teacher who has been out on EDL

> has to do with the support a teacher gets from the administration and from their colleagues. I think even with supportive administration and no support of the colleagues, it is really going to be difficult. I think there almost has to be an education about, we don't talk about long term disability,...., like mental illness and stuff, you just don't talk about.

In her case, it would appear, whenever the administration challenged what she felt was her role description upon coming back, Semantha held her ground.

To recapitulate, the role of the teacher-administrator relationship is important in the return to work process. The majority of the co-researchers attribute in large measure the crisis that led them to leave work and eventually go on EDL to the principal they had at the time. Upon returning, they were often found themselves working in schools with new principals who expressed support and offers of assistance to them. This assistance and support came in several forms including offering them the grade they wanted to teach, giving positive comments about their work, and acknowledging the participants' goals in terms of their personal health. Due to their position of power and authority, this positive interaction between the participants and the principals contributed to an easing of the fear and the anxiety level in the majority of the study's participants. Such relationships also provided opportunities to continue recovery and to promote success. However, in two cases, the relationship did not appear all that helpful. In both of these instances, the participants stated that their relationships with fellow teachers at the school helped them to get through this difficulty.

Subtheme 2.6 Watching Your Health

Several teachers who took part in the study mentioned that they did not want to wind up being ill again so they were taking measures to prevent this from happening. For example, Dorothy is very much aware when she is under stress and she pays attention to her symptoms. She took two weeks off herself during her second year back because of the increasing stress levels. Her advice to herself and others was to "take it easy or else take some time because you may go down, totally."

Melinda has to work continually to manage her pain and, despite her efforts, sometimes nothing works. As she related:

> Now I have a multitude of things that can help me. Some days they don't. None of it works. I'm working .5 and I have a positive attitude. ... I have been working through it for years but I know there are a few more options out there and sometimes you get disappointed when they don't work for you like today.

Jerome is very careful about how much stress he allows himself.

" Ah, soon as I get into any, it can be a very negative experience. I have a very, very profound fear of being where I was 10 years ago, because 10 years ago I was unable to do anything."

As a result of their experiences, some of the teachers became very aware of their bodies and began to pay attention to signals they give. They realized that they were not in perfect health when they went back and, in order to stay working, they would have to take some responsibility in managing their own health.

Subtheme 2.7 Reacting to Reentry Experiences

In every case except one, each participant claimed that their return to work experience was generally positive but with some frustrations. Melinda described herself as apprehensive at first. However, overall, she labelled her experience as good except for the frustration and anger she developed in dealing with the benefit plan. As she stated, " There was a point a couple of months ago when I was told I had to make it official that I was coming back next year .5." When she did this she was ordered to take more tests because representatives of the plan considered that she could work more than .5. "I have been working hard to stay healthy for .5. They expect you to be as good as new and maybe you won't be as good as new."

Jerome, in relating his description of his experience, stated that some things were counterproductive. First of all, he was distressed because "when I did go back part time my health did deteriorate and has never gotten back to where it was before I went back in." By way of contrast, he reported that finding "a situation in which I could function with a school administration" and "understanding that junior high is not a good place to be and to stick to elementary" were worthwhile discoveries.

Dorothy related that her return to work experience was pretty good. She attributed, this, in part, to her buddy, saying "I don't think that I would have lasted that first year if it hadn't been for this buddy. And then I kind of stuck it out because of her knowing that I had a real good relationship with her, working relationship" She also reported that she had to take a couple of weeks off due to the stress but was able to go back to work after that.

Samuel was appreciative of his situation and considered himself to be lucky. He pointed out that he had gotten administrative support, which he described as a novelty for him and he considered this more of a matter of luck. He was pleased that his health was holding and his recovery was continuing. He also reported that the working conditions were okay. Samuel stated, " There may have been days, maybe even weeks where I might have done some back sliding or levelled off but generally the over all trend is that I am getting healthier and healthier."

Kassidy stated that her reentry experience was getting better everyday. She reported "starting to feel like her old self again and getting healthier too." As well, she stated that her confidence is starting to return. "I have a renewed enjoyment of children. I feel I' m reclaiming my role."

Semantha used the words "very positive over the long run" to describe her return. She reported having to be assertive at times with people who did not understand her situation. As she stated, "Before I made an effort to be congenial with everyone, but I don't waste my time anymore which does isolate me in certain ways but its called survival. My energy goes into my teaching."

Alize claimed that she was "very lucky that I have a health plan that has let me do this, for one thing and that most of the people I met in all, apart from very rare exceptions, people were extraordinarily helpful and kind to date."

Zachary related that his first attempt was terrifying and "the second leaving was probably a little less painful but in some ways it almost a little more insidious because here I was back after Christmas Holiday Break and it just suddenly hit me and neither one were pleasant in terms of that." He reported that he was going to try again.

Harold, in describing his reentry experience, used the term " sacrificial lamb." Before he left, he told his school board that it was his intent to return. He related that he had to come back part time for a short period then full time. "It may have not been the best thing for me but based on what was, what the board allowed me to do, that was all I could do. I hear people now are able to do this (return gradually), I say that's great but it's unfortunate to have gone through what I went through."

To conclude, the generation of the generally favorable descriptions was based upon several factors. These factors included: a teaching assignment which the participant viewed as positive and could satisfy the demands of the role, a good relationship with the administration, supportive staff members and a climate that allowed for their recovery to continue. At the same time, frustrations arose due to perceptions by some of the participants of the lack of accommodation of their needs by the administration to their needs and conflicting expectations between benefit plan and the returning teachers.

Theme 3 Reentry Issues

As a result of their reentry experiences, the participants had several issues with regard to their reentry process and compiled several suggestions that they believed could potentially make the reentry experiences of others less traumatic. These suggestions were specifically directed towards teachers, school boards, the extended disability insurance package and support groups.

Subtheme 3.1 Advising Other Teachers

As part of the study, each participant was asked what advice or suggestions they would have for teachers who are planning to return to work after being on EDL. Melinda, when asked this question, was hesitant in responding and then finally said that in her experience with other teachers on leave, she felt that they had experienced similar situations, "We can understand where people are coming from, every body's circumstances are different. You can suggest what was helpful in similar situations." Furthermore, she stated there was probably no one answer or one piece of advice for everybody. Results from the study would indicate Melinda's comments were correct. There were many different ideas offered but there were three suggestions that were voiced by several of the participants. These were:

1. Don't go back until you feel that you are ready.
2. A gradual return to work may be a preferable option for those returning.
3. There is a point when you have to try to come back.

Don't Go Back Until You Feel That You Are Ready

Zachary reported that prior to going back you have to make certain you have come to grips with what has led you to go out on leave. He maintained that, if not, "you are going to start forgetting how things were that led up to you leaving. So unless you have really come to terms with it or believe you have don't rush back, use all the services you can and don't let anyone rush you back in. I sort of rushed back in the second time." Dorothy concurred with Zachary's response of not going back until you are ready. She also maintained that teachers should try to negotiate with the school board, a placement in which the teacher feels comfortable.

A Gradual Return to Work May be Preferable

Zachary expressed the hope that a teacher would have the option of being able to go back preferably on a part time basis "rather then jumping in with both feet right away again. " To him rehabilitative employment was an option that he hoped an employer would consider first. Samuel and Alize also used the option of rehabilitative employment and found it helpful in their transition to reentry. Dorothy and Harold expressed similar views that if the employer would allow it, consideration should be given to going back gradually.

There is a Point When You Have to Try to Come Back

There is an assumption that, at one point or another for most teachers on EDL, that they will go back. However, Harold's comment is quite interesting when he stated that in "talking with people, the perception is it's impossible to come back off of it." Despite this belief held by some, Harold is adamant that "if you can't then maybe it's time to retire, or resign." Zachary stated that one extremely important consideration to make "is to decide whether teaching is still what you want to do with your life." His suggestion is that teachers examine what they have taught in the past and to think about the possibility of a change. Change may involve deciding not to teach again.

This opened up a larger question, whether you or not you still liked teaching. This point was raised by several participants and they related how their involvement in some support groups brought this to their realization. Stories were related as to how comments were made which indicated that some teachers on EDL did not like teaching, did not like the changes that were going on in education. This in itself could have serious implications as to whether or not a teacher really wanted to go back to work. In the case of the study's participants, each one of them made it clear that they liked the kids and they liked teaching.

In summary, the advice offered to teachers was varied. It was the perception of some of the participants that teachers on EDL were not given enough time to recover before being required to go back to work. Based upon this perception their advice to others was not to be pushed but to go back when they believe they are ready. Three of the participants had used the option of rehabilitation employment prior to going back to work. This they recommended as something to be considered by others as a way of transition to reemployment. Finally, they recommended serious consideration of all options by teachers including, even as painful as it may sound, the option of not continuing in teaching.

Subtheme 3.2 Advising the School Boards

Each participant is employed by a school board and the school personnel policies, specifically return to work policies, have a profound affect on the teacher who goes back. As has already been shown and suggested by earlier comments, some boards are much more flexible in their return to work policies than others. The study participants talked at length about their school boards and from analysis several recommendations emerged. These recommendations were that:

1. The school boards have to have a better understanding of the experiences school personnel face when they return to work after being on or while on EDL.
2. There is a need for more flexible return to work procedures.

Need for Understanding by the School Boards

Dorothy stated that she felt there was a lack of concern by some school board officials when it came to teachers and the whole issue of EDL. She recounted that she had heard expressed sentiments, by some school board officials, that these people are only our problem for 90 days then its up to the insurance company. She maintained that she felt that the school boards should take the problem seriously.

Samuel went a little further than Dorothy and outlined some specific things that the boards could do. "I would tell them to spend sometime and some money and resources to find out ... what's happening to their employees that makes them go off in the first place." He maintained that some boards have been using their teachers like soldiers. "Soldiers in war get used up and if they're killed, they have to be replaced and if they're wounded, they have to get patched up and sent back into battle and in my case, I was wounded and it didn't need to happen, it didn't need to happen at all." He went on to urge the school boards, in a free unthreatening forum, allow their teachers to speak and to listen to these teachers as they as they describe the difficult working conditions under which they carry out their jobs. Samuel suggested that a more common labor-management approach today by many progressive companies was to talk to the employees if they really wanted to find out what is happening and he felt that this approach should be endorsed by the school boards.

Jerome reported that he felt that boards have to "start looking at teacher energy as a resource not as a commodity. Such an approach, he suggested, would change fundamentally the relationship between teachers and boards and perhaps go some distance to their working together to solve some of the problems that are contributing to teachers having to go on EDL.

Harold maintained that school boards have got to realize that, in theory, each teacher who is on EDL will be coming back and it has to have policies that will accommodate and assist these teachers in their return. Alize gave an example of the need for clear policy statement. In her particular case, she received conflicting information from different school board officials about her reemployment which had the potential to jeopardize her full time continuous employment. In the end it was clarified but, as she stated, "you may end up with people in my position thinking they have to go back full-time unless they clarify it through all these other sources." The policy decision, which took some time to clarify and which increased her anxiety while waiting, in the end seemed to please her. She could work part-time for two years in addition to the year of her return and keep her full-time contract.

Kassidy, in regard to policy, felt that it was important for school boards to realize that the teacher has to be involved in the process to get him/her back to work. She related that voluntary transfer requests should be honoured where possible and every opportunity be used to allow the teacher who is returning to be placed " in a positive environment where he or she can have a chance to recover and succeed."

Semantha raised the issue, which is heard many times that administrators do not want teachers who come back from EDL on their staffs. She called for the boards to establish a means whereby more positive relationships could be established between these teachers and the principals. Some of this may be achieved through education "of administration in particular, that it's not the crappy teachers that go on LTD in this case. It's the concerned, caring teacher, and they're probably going to be a greater asset to your school than a liability but I don't think many administrators see that." Melinda reported that she was part of a committee of teachers who sat down with a couple of boards to provide them with information and relate their personal experiences. This could be a part of the education program that Semantha was suggesting.

Zachary related how the boards need to understand the nature and "dilemma of teacher illness." He maintained that these teachers are those that "cared too much about what they were doing and became disillusioned or disenchanted with what was happening." He called upon boards to be more compassionate by adopting an attitude and policies that reflect the worth of these people and rid themselves of an attitude which he perceives and phrased "as maybe we'd be just as well off without them."

The Need For More Flexible Return to Work Procedures

From the comments raised by the teachers it would appear that some boards are more flexible in their return to work procedures than others. It was this apparent lack of consistency that appears to be causing problems for some people. In regard to this, Zachary recommended that boards help teachers find a placement for themselves that is conducive to their current situation, not just throwing them back into the fray," which he believed, could make the situation worse.

Kassidy would support Zachary's recommendation because she maintained that, "although it may not be possible to place every returning teacher where they want to be, it would be to the advantage of the school board and everyone involved to place the teacher in a positive environment where he or she can have a chance to recover and succeed." This could happen, Zachary stated, by having the Human Resources, or someone in authority, sit down with the teachers and fully assess the situation, develop a return to work plan "using all the resources at their hand to try to ease them back in." He suggested that failure to do this could result in a teacher being placed in a situation where he or she, in a short time, may have to go back on leave again. He stated the fact that this happens indicates that "the reentry process needs a lot of work."

Flexible return to work procedures also included the need for a gradual return to work. Gradual return to work included the concept of working less than full time for a while. In almost every participant's case, the teachers went back part time, at least in the beginning, and some are still at that point today. The teachers appreciated this but some of them were concerned that it did not appear to be available to all teachers coming back from EDL. Alize's earlier comments demonstrated how it took some time for her own board to clarify the rules for her. Dorothy urged a gradual return as well, and she too alluded to the need for school boards to allow their teachers to know that gradual return was possible so they could take advantage of it if they so desired. Despite the fact that Harold went back part time, there appeared to be no attempt by the school to change his timetable so in fact he was teaching part time. In reality, he was in the school building a lot longer with time off between classes. Harold stated that, fortunately his board today does appear to be more flexible in its return procedures than when he was on EDL.

To conclude, the participants noted the importance of school personnel policies in their return to work. There was a perception by the majority of the study's participants that there was a lack of understanding and caring by school boards for teachers who are on EDL. There was also the perception that teachers were not valued. One important suggestion made by two of the teachers was that school boards change their philosophy about teachers considering them a resource not a commodity to be used up. Others suggested that boards spend time and money to research the problems so they know what is happening. Such research and informational sessions provided by teachers, who have been or are on EDL, may lead some boards and local administrators to adopt a more accepting and caring attitude. A more concrete example of what could be done to promote success in reentry would be to have a reentry plan developed by teachers themselves in conjunction with school boards.

Subtheme 3.3 Using the Extended Disability Benefit Package

Each of the teachers who participated in the study assumed that they were covered by the conditions of their respective plans. However, as was discussed earlier, two participants found out, to their dismay, that they would receive no benefits from their plan while they were out. Both of these teachers explained, in some detail, the lengths to which they tried to get their respective carriers to cover them but to no avail. The experiences of the teachers, while receiving benefits from their EDL plan, were mixed. Zachary, for example described his relationship with plan personnel as quite positive and urged others to use the services provided to the fullest. He suggested that rehabilitation services should be used. Samuel and Alize both commented about going to work as volunteers prior to returning to classroom teaching and how it helped in making their reentry a little easier by again getting used to the school and the dynamic of the school again. Semantha's concern had to do with the time she felt it took to grant her EHB. She found that, despite not functioning well, she had to phone around to different people regularly to ensure that her benefits would be granted. While she was waiting for a decision, she was fearful of a refusal which would have meant a loss of income and pension which she felt she could not afford.

In Samuel's case, he alluded to the fact that the "benefit part of their title is an interesting word. A lot of the time they felt like the enemy." He listed several things which they expected him to do that he himself did not feel well enough to do. The most frustrating thing that he found was that different people, involved in his case from the school board and the benefit plan, were trying to communicate through him rather than deal directly with each other. "I was mentally wrecked. ...I couldn't think clearly. .. I couldn't keep track of things. My memory was gone and yet they were expecting me to negotiate all these requests." He urged that a mechanism be set up where that would not have to happen to other people.

One of most controversial aspects of the plan had to do with pressure the teachers felt they were being put under by the plan to increase their length of employment day at the school. This, of course, was applicable to teachers who had gone back part time. Melinda reported that it had been initially agreed that she would go back .5. She was questioned as to whether or not she would becoming back .5 the following year. When she was replied she was, she was encouraged to phone the disability plan personnel who in turn ordered her to undergo an IME exam. Melinda felt threatened and stressed because she was fearful that she have have work more than .5 despite the fact that she herself felt unable to do so. "I have been working hard to stay healthy for .5 and I have a condition that may not allow me to work more than that. I need the financial support from the rehab to do things and even if it turned out that I was only .5, I am still saving them more money than if I was off all the time." Alize reported a similar situation. She went back to work .8 time and later on that year, when asked her status for the next year, she also reported she would be going back .8. She too was asked to take a series of medical tests which she did. Both teachers were allowed to remain at their working status but the process caused them both a lot of emotional turmoil which they felt was not needed. In both cases, their own personal doctor's input helped in allowing the teachers to remain at their work level. Semantha related that she is going through a similar experience now. She is working about .6 and has been for about 2 years. The plan personnel feels that she is not continuing to improve and as a result she fears that she may be cut off her EHB.

The benefit plan was perceived by some of the teachers to be a friend as well as an enemy. The plan certainly provided several helpful rehabilitation services to the participants such as alternate forms of employment as well as income while on leave. However, the procedures under which the plan operated, at times, left the teachers frustrated and angry. Getting the access to the coverage they paid for proved a challenge. Upon returning to work, several of the teachers who went back less than fulltime reported that they felt pressured to increase their amount of work. Several teachers perceived these suggestions as threats to their benefits and found themselves seeking the support of their physicians to continue working at their present level.

Subtheme 3.4 Joining Support Groups

Many of the teachers reported finding help in support groups. Dorothy related that she went to a couple of Alberta Teachers' Association/ Extended Disability Leave meetings which were being held about once a month. She felt that they were useful to her because she discovered that "there are other people out there going through the same thing I'm going through because up till then I felt alone." The group specifically provided an avenue to talk about stress, suggested books to read and, as well, it was kind of a social thing too."

Alize also went to the ATA support group. She too reported that she did not know about it at first. She thought it would be useful for others to know of the group's existence. When she started attending the meetings, she described the format as usually consisting of a guest speaker, " time to mingle and chat and eat something and drink something which always engenders a little bit of interaction and you could really compare notes on what you were doing." From her participation in the group she saw the different places that each of these teachers were on their path to recovery and she stated that she began to realize that " I was probably a little less frightened than many of the other people who were really terrified, cause they didn't, many of the other people had no idea where they would be put ... they didn't know where or what grade level, whereas I did know that."

This group does not appear to be widely advertised, certainly in Semantha's view. Semantha discovered that this group existed after being out for almost a year, despite the fact, she had been in contact with several people from the ATA during that year. Samuel also reported going to these meetings.

Semantha did discover a group which she attended for a while. The group, called The Teacher Hope Initiative, is a project component of the Hope Foundation. She reported going to several meetings but that she found, despite being a good idea, something was missing for her so she left the group. Samuel, Alize and Jerome also went to the Hope Foundation meetings for a while. Samuel claimed it helped a bit because it "was nice to know that there are others in the same sort of circumstance and that there is hope." Alize felt it was helpful for similar reasons. Melinda attended the support group and found the group very helpful to her because these people were sharing similar experiences to her own. Acceptance was an important issue for her and she stated that "they accept you for where you are at, they are not judgmental if you are not up to something that is fine with them and if somebody misses a meeting everybody is wanting to know where they are and they sort of look out for each other. It's a good feeling."

Zachary has found the Teacher Hope Initiative to be extremely helpful to him personally. He described the group as using hope theory which he stated maintains

> that almost any difficulty a person might encounter in their life, be it physical, be it emotional and there is a manifestation of both in any case that there is a light at the end of the

> tunnel. There is literally always hope but you have to find it and work towards it and just try to improve your life by that and often times it's rediscovering, and it sounds corny but you find yourself again or you may become a new you which a lot of people can't understand because then they think well you have changed but virtually everybody I have dealt with have said it has been a traumatic experience but it's been a life changing experience for them. So we're trying to use that in helping people to recover and get on with their lives no matter what it is they might be doing, going back to teaching or going on to sell real estate or whatever they do."

Zachary has found that being a member of the group has allowed him to see other people like himself move on with their lives and at the same time has allowed him to use some of his skills and abilities and to feel and be useful in a positive way.

To conclude, the participants reported that there were different types of support groups. One group appeared to be more social in its orientation and the Teacher Hope Initiative was more psychologically based. Both groups serve several functions. Some perceived going to a group as a way of breaking the isolation and making social contact. The groups were also perceived to be a place to meet people who may have found themselves on EDL and a place to share their experiences, information and a place to find acceptance. The groups provided opportunities for comparison of how far a person had come in comparison to others sharing a similar experience. Despite the relative importance of these groups to several participants, they perceived the groups to be relatively unknown and felt that more effort should be made to bring awareness of their existence,

Summary

From the analysis of the interviews, three broad themes were detected and these were: the Recovery Process, Reentry Experience and Reentry Issues. The first theme looked at how and what the co-researchers did to rebuild their health. The second theme provided detail about their experiences as they made the transition from EDL to part time or full time work in the classroom. Finally, theme three looked at different factors which the participants felt, at times, complicated and/or assisted their reentry.

The themes and subthemes obtained from the data suggested that, despite, the individual experiences of the study's participants, there were commonalities in their experiences at various stages as they attempted to regain their health and careers. Their experiences profoundly affected their lives and had an impact on those who journeyed with them. Theirs is a great challenge and, clearly, it is through their own individual efforts and the ongoing support of many people that the challenge is eventually brought into focus. Once focussed, it would then seem possible to rebuild one's life. It would appear, however, that even when they were able to go back to work, the rebuilding did not stop. Rather, perhaps it is in the rebuilding and continually shoring up the walls, that these teachers are provided with the strength to attempt a reentry and to continue to work.

Chapter 5

Conclusions and Implications

Introduction

This paper sought to explore the return to work experiences of teachers on extended disability leave and to discover, what if any are, common themes of the experience. From the analysis of the participants' interviews and other related literature and documents, the findings generated three major themes. These were the Recovery Process, Reentry Experience and Reentry Issues. By using the information provided by the participants, a description of each theme can now be developed. The descriptions present the challenges faced by teachers as they attempt to regain health and go back to work. By reading these descriptions, one comes to an awareness and, hopefully, an understanding of the experience.

The Recovery Process

A teacher' s role involves giving to students, other staff, administration, parents and society as a whole. It is a role marked by conflicting expectations and self-belief statements that guide his or her daily life. The teacher demonstrates that he or she is in control by being thrust into the spotlight, handling the many demands and making numerous decisions during the course of the day, everyday. For some teachers this continuing role, coupled with the complications of their personal lives, can lead to illness. It happens gradually almost insidiously but the downward spiral does begin. It is not uncommon to see teachers begin to work harder but to their surprise, they find they are accomplishing less. The coping mechanisms used in the past are no longer able to bring relief. As the illness gets more pronounced and the clouds of despair darken, there comes a point where the unspeakable reality has to be faced, that is having to leave work. The move from work to short term leave and then extended disability leave is often marked by dwindling contact with those with whom the teacher has worked, perhaps disbelief and anger from those you love, a growing sense of isolation, and a loss of control. Most often the person, outside of the family and friends, to whom the teacher might turn is their physician. The doctor becomes a source of relief from the isolation, a source of information, a source of comfort, understanding and reassurance, a source of help and a source of referral to others to whom the teacher can turn for help. The physician can help the teacher mend the physical body and do what he or she can to help mend the mind. In time the health team widens to include specialists from many disciplines. The psychiatrists and psychologists try to help the teacher make sense of the events that have befallen him or her, the illness and feelings that have turned the teacher's life up side down. Both in the beginning may see their role as supportive but in time they help the teacher confront the issues and feelings that have contributed to their present situation. In challenging unrealistic personal beliefs, growth can and does occur. It is only by giving up control that a person gains control. As the search for help continues, the teacher finds that there are still friends to whom he or she can talk, share and be accepted for where he or she is. Also reading becomes a source of understanding and knowledge that he or she is not the only one who has shared his or her malady and recovered. Readings have become not only tips of what to do or avoid but sources of inspiration to carry on, sources of personal discovery and reaffirmation.

The recovery process is for some teachers painfully slow and requires patience and persistence. However, with the medication, many doctor appointments, exercise, dealing with personal issues, some improvement begins to occur. The recovery process is often marked by false starts, false hopes of going back to work soon, only to have them dashed by the reality that he or she is not ready. In time, however, confidence does begin to return. The teacher does begin to feel better. Despite the fragility of his or her health, the possibility of returning to work is seriously contemplated .

The Reentry Experience

It is the expectation of the vast majority of teachers who go on EDL that they will eventually return to work. As the teacher's health improves, making the decision to return to work becomes a real possibility. The decision often is not made in isolation but rather with the assistance of the various health practitioners that the teacher has assembled to help with his or her recovery. At times the decision is arrived at unanimously that the time has come to try, at other times, there is disagreement because either the practitioners or the teacher does not think that he or she is ready. However, once the decision is made to return to work, school boards have to be notified and the conditions of employment determined. The teacher soon discovers how flexible the school board is in accommodating his or her return. For some teachers going back may mean working less than fulltime, finding a new assignment, perhaps a new school and /or an administrator that is willing to give the teacher another chance. For others it is a return to the same placement and school they had before they went on EDL.

The experience of reentry is fraught with a mixture of feelings including anxiety, trepidation, fear and happiness. The mixture of negative feelings arise from many sources. There are the comments from those who are or have been on EDL and who warn not to return too early or comments by those who say it is impossible to get off of EDL. There are fears generated from personal experiences which contributed to their decision to leave in the first place. There are fears generated by the unknown, a new placement, a new school and/or a new administration. As well, there are fears arising from wondering how other teachers will react to the returning teacher. Of course, there is the ever present fear of personal failure, of not being able to return. The fear is all the more real because of the financial and professional implications created by such a scenario. It is these fears tempered somewhat by the happiness of being able to return to work that accompany the teacher's reentry to the classroom.

The dynamic of the school encroaches upon the reentering teacher very quickly. As he or she might have expected there are pockets of resistance to his or her return. Usually this comes in the form of silence from certain staff members and/or conversations that quickly come to a end as the returning teacher approaches. Very quickly the teacher begins to sense that some staff do not welcome his/her presence. By contrast there are other teachers in the same school who do come forward to offer assurance, assistance and encouragement. The dropping off of extra copies of worksheets, suggested opportunities for co-planning and sharing ideas suggest that he or she is not alone. These gestures are not meant to extenuate weakness but rather as genuine signs of welcoming and support. In time friendships do develop with staff members. Friendships make it easier to face and accept the works, joys and tumult of the day and provides opportunities for ongoing sharing and support.

Still without the support of the principal, the reentry is exceedingly more difficult. Finding a principal who offers encouragement, praise and makes accommodation for him or her is a hopeful sign. The fears do subside over time as there is a growing realization that he or she can do the job, that he or she is reclaiming their role and finding purpose once more. The medical appointments do continue as his or her recovery is continuing while back at work. Many teachers speak of coming back to work with a new attitude, one which allows them to balance their teaching with the other needs of their lives.

However, if one is not careful the old patterns of behavior can return. Setting limits and maintaining them can become increasingly difficult but it is continuing to apply these limits that one's health will continue to improve. A successful reentry is more likely to occur when the reentering teacher believes that he or she can satisfy the demands of his or her role, has colleagues that are supportive and encouraging, has a supportive relationship with the administration and has an opportunity to continue his or her recovery.

Reentry Issues

Teachers are part of a system and as such do not operate in isolation. One major part of the system, the employer, has policies and practices by which it operates and, for some teachers, it is these policies and practices that have contributed in large measure to them having to take EDL. A teacher may view the system in which they work as flawed yet there does not seem to be anyone in the board and/or association who is willing to examine what is actually happening and to take corrective action where needed. Coupled with this there is the perception by the teacher on EDL that his or her respective board and/ or association often seem to forget about him or her. He or she would go so far to believe that the board personnel really don' t care. Loss of contact and perceived or real difficulties in obtaining employment conducive to reentry are examples of this attitude. If the situation could be investigated together, teachers and the board, in an open unthreatening format, problem areas could be identified and solutions found and implemented to solve system wide difficulties. As well, by prying back the door of ignorance and examining the situation of teachers on EDL, the teacher hopes that a change in attitude would occur that would bring understanding and empathy to their plight and alter negative attitudes of some administrators and teachers.

Another important part of the system is the insurance carrier. Again the carrier has its own policies and practices which at times are difficult to understand. The benefits provided and paid for at least in part by the teacher are seen as worthwhile. There is an expectation that insurance coverage will be accessible when needed. However, the process by which one has to obtain and maintain the benefits can cause the teacher a great deal of extra stress on top of what they may be already experiencing. This is especially felt at the beginning of the process to obtain benefits and subsequently during the reentry phase as the carrier places greater demands upon the teacher working less than fulltime to increase their workload. The teacher believes that he or she is doing all they can to maintain their present assignment. Teachers on EDL consider these attitudes to be uncaring, unreasonable and callous. The teacher more than anyone would like to progress more quickly. However, quick recovery may not be possible and recognition of this by the carrier is considered to be vitally important by the participants in this study.

Discussion

Many of the major findings of this study have also been reported in other research on return to work. This study proposes three major themes involved in returning to work after being on extended health benefits. These were the Recovery Process, the Reentry Experience and Reentry Issues. Jevne and Zingle (1992) in their study on Alberta teachers identified four themes and these were Recognizing I'm in Trouble, Making the Transition to Long Term Disability, Rehabilitating and Seeking Resolution. Despite the differences in the number of major themes, the findings of these studies do share much in common with each other. These similarities include the negativism that can cloud one vision of the future upon leaving work due to serious emotional and/or physical illness and the searching for help. As well, there is the necessary shifting of expectations and beliefs as one recovers, the role of social support, the optimism that can arise as health improves and one begins to regain control of his/her life. Finally, there are the challenges to be faced and overcome as he or she begins to go back to work.

There is a growing body of research that suggests that prolonged exposure to stress is a major but not the sole factor that has contributed to a growing number of teachers having to leave the classroom due to poor health (Young and Russell, 1995; Jevne et al., 1994; Ryan, 1992; Jevne and Zingle, 1992; Lunenburg and Cadavid, 1992; Jenkins and Calhoun, 1991; Farber, 1991; Kyriacou, 1987. Recent statistics from the Alberta School Employee Benefit Plan confirm that the participants are part of a growing number of teachers in Alberta who are having to take extended disability leave. A July 1998 report entitled "It's for your benefit" stated that extended health care claims "skyrocketed in 1997" and they believed this to be the result of downloading in the health care system and stress in the education system (p. 3). Their document also stated that the number of "employees on disability has increased in recent years" and that they suspected that "the stresses in the education sector are a contributing factor in the increased number of people on disability." (p. 3).

Primarily, it was the medical and psychological communities that offered assistance to the participants and, generally, it was viewed as positive. The psychological support came in the form of being listened to, helping the participants confront their beliefs and search for alternate ways of coping and/or making changes in their lives. Research by Pierce and Malloy (1990) and Salo (1995) did come to the conclusion that many teachers suffering from high levels of stress and burnout employ a narrow band of coping strategies. Although teachers were not directly able to change the environment in which they work, they were perhaps able through counselling to develop a wider array of coping strategies and perhaps alter their unrealistic beliefs about teaching and their role in the process. As well, deciding to return to work did not necessarily mean that you were well again because for almost all the co-researchers, medical and/or psychological treatment of some kind was ongoing. Jevne and Zingle (1992) found some biases by teachers toward partaking of psychological services while on EDL despite the fact that many would be able to benefit (p. 232). These biases did not seem as prevalent among the participants as many of them sought psychological help while they were on EDL and continued with it while they were back at work. In fact, it would appear that more and more teachers on extended health benefits are making use of psychological services (ASEBP, July 1998)

Supportive relationships was viewed by the participants as another important aspect of their return to work experience. Jevne and Zingle (1992) would indicate that a vital factor in restoring health is maintaining connections. Social support is important because of the establishment and maintenance of close ties is an important aspect of well-being (Hobfoll and Vaux, 1993). Some of the teachers in the present study desired contact with the school as they were recovering and found ways of maintaining that contact. Others wanted no contact, at least, until the latter stages of their recovery. However, as the teachers returned to work, they found their colleagues mostly supportive. The positive support was helpful in the transition from being on EDL to going back to work and for some participants their successful reentry was aided significantly by these supportive relationships within the school. Colleagues provided a caring atmosphere marked sharing, encouragement and praise and developing relationships. At times finding a fellow teacher who may have already walked in their shoes allowed the returning teacher the opportunity to see that he/she was not alone, and allowed the comparison of notes and provision of mutual support. The importance of supportive relationships has also been mentioned by other researchers. Cherniss (1995) stated that a supportive work setting was important in reducing burnout. This supportive work setting included among other things recognition and feedback, interest of the boss, support for continued learning and collegial relationships with others. In the opinion of the researcher, such an environment would be advantageous to a teacher reentering after being on EDL.

Personal beliefs shape our life and when these beliefs come into conflict with reality, a crisis can erupt. Cherniss (1995) maintained that as stress turns to burnout changes in personal thinking do occur. These he stated included the adoption of more modest goals, blaming someone else or the system for lack of success and liking clients less. Chorney (1997) stated that the impact of personal beliefs especially about teaching may well contribute to the stress levels teachers ultimately experience. For teachers in the present study, a considerable amount of reflection about their beliefs and attitudes towards their working lives did indeed occur. These teachers wanted to be good teachers in the context of perserving their health so they would not have to live through this experience again. Similar sentiments were expressed by some of the teachers in the Jevne and Zingle study (pp. 100-102). When the shift comes, there is a realization that individual health, taking time for oneself, is at least as important as fulfilling the demands of work.

The need for flexibility in return to work arrangements was a concern among the returning the teachers. Each teacher had to negotiate his/her own return and the degree of accommodation by the board varied with regard to teaching level and position. In terms of flexible employment options, the urban boards who employed the teachers in the present study appeared more willing to look at part time employment than some of the boards employing teachers in the Jevne and Zingle study (pp. 107-110). As well, in the Young and Russell (1995) study, some of the teachers were in a position where they could return to work at less than full time employment.

The majority of teachers who participated in the current study attribute in large measure the crisis that led them to leave work and eventually go on EDL to the principal they had at the time. These teachers had as their belief that whether or not they succeeded upon reentry hinged somewhat upon their relationship with their school based administration. This belief does not seem without some credence as Jevne and Zingle stated

> the administrator has the potential to profoundly influence, negatively or positively, the quality of the experience of teaching, as well as the impact and experience of being on long term disability. Administrative style is a crucial variable in the health of teachers (p. 238).

Similar observations were reached by Russell et al., (1987), Dworkin et al., (1990) and Zimmerman (1992). Each of these respective studies maintained that the role of the principal was crucial in reducing high levels of stress and incidents of burnout. Therefore upon reentry, it would be important that a returning teacher be placed in an environment where the principal is supportive and where the returning teacher is treated as a valued and trusted colleague. The majority of the participants found that their administrators were helpful upon reentry. Such relationships did provide opportunities to continue to recover and provide encouragement.

Teachers do not operate in isolation but are part of much larger system. Therefore, some of the participants viewed the difficulties that they have experienced as systemic and thus felt that there was the need to examine the environment in which they were expected to function.

There was an expression by some of the participants that school boards really don't care about teachers on EDL and lack understanding of the problems that lead to EDL. There is also a perception by some that a thorough open investigation into the what is happening in the schools is needed. Such an investigation would spotlight the conditions under which teachers work and students learn. Identification of the problem areas and their resolution would contribute to reducing stress levels within the classroom and result in the system being more responsive to the needs of the teachers. Cherniss (1995) recommended a similar course of action to reduce the incidences of burnout. He too suggested that the staff, workers and supervisors examine the environment in which they work and where necessary look at ways of making changes. Such steps could also result in a reduction in the number of teachers applying for EDL.

Some of the participants felt that there was a need for educating school boards, administrators and teachers about what it is like to be on EDL and the challenges involved in returning to work. Young and Russell (1995) stated that there is a relative lack of research into the return to work of individuals suffering from stress or stress related conditions (p. 223). Perhaps by school boards and teacher associations inquiring into their own particular circumstances, a greater body of knowledge could be amassed and education programs developed. Such education programs may lead to a change in negative attitudes expressed by some administrators and some teacher colleagues about teachers on EDL. A similar program was recommended in the Jevne and Zingle study in 1992. Cherniss (1995) recognized the fact that conditions do change and often people do not have the skills necessary to contend with their changing roles. He suggested that providing education in these areas so in time the skill levels could be increased. Many sources of acquiring skills do exist such as engaging with other teachers in similar situations, seeking out professionals in the area and mentoring the implementation of ideas. It has been the experience of the researcher that some administrators are becoming more aware of EDL as some of their fellow administrators are on it.

There was an identified need for clearly stated compassionate policies in regard to extended disability benefits and procedures in the return to work process. Reactions toward the extended disability plan varied from thinking it was excellent to believing it was the enemy. The procedures to get the benefits prove cumbersome for some probably more so because of their own health at the time of application. As well, once a person did go back to work, several of the co- researchers believed themselves to be pressured to increase their time at work in subsequent years. The pressure served to heighten anxiety for the participants and resulted in them to mobilizing medical and psychological support for their cause. Awareness of these policies by the employees of the insurance carrier, the school board employees and teachers themselves may help prevent delays in decision-making and unrealistic expectations. A clear statement of disability related policies, an interdisciplinary team approach and the provision of job modification would also be of assistance. Such a process would allow for more teacher input as to job placement and flexibility regarding return to work time. This latter recommendation, the majority of the participants agreed, is happening more frequently now than in the past.

In summary, many of the issues raised by the participants have been validated in the literature. For example, in Theme 1, the Recovery Process, other researchers have pointed out the need to seek help from the medical and psychological communities, the importance of supportive relationships and the need to challenge personal beliefs which may in turn be contributing to their ill health. The second theme, the Reentry Experience also found some support in the literature. Several studies outlined the need for flexible reentry employment options, supportive relationships at work and the importance of the teacher-administrator relationship. Several of the issues raised in the third theme, Reentry Issues, were also spoken of as concerns by other researchers. These included the need for clearly delineated compassionate policies with regard to extended disability coverage and procedures regarding return to work.

Implications of the Findings

Using thematic analysis has offered a way of coming to an understanding and developing greater sensitivity towards the experience of teachers who return to work after being on EDL. The sustained examination and involvement with those who have lived the experience has made this researcher aware and, hopefully, others who read this document of the life changing experience health disability can bring about in a person. Despite the uniqueness of each individual experience, there were similarities in what they were experiencing. Overall, the participants have provided a rich description which in the beginning is marked by a body broken either physically or emotionally or both, dreams destroyed, despair and hopelessness. They have indicated that there is a point, often discovered in conjunction with external supports, where an effort is made to seek an understanding of what is wrong with them. The road to recovery is marked by many hurdles and it is process which takes time. For some there is a realization, as difficult as it may seem, that they may never be able to work as hard or as long as they had before. It is process of starting over to discover who you are and what you are capable of doing. For many the process of recovery is on going even when they have returned to work. The decision to return to work can often be terrifying and anxiety laden yet there is the realization one must try. Again once the decision is made to return, the experience is not without its disappointments and challenges. However, the on going external supports and personal work of each participant contribute to allowing each one of them to attempt and sustain a return to work. Those who have returned have learned much from their own painful experience and have a desire to pass on to others suggestions to avoid what they have gone through. It is their hope that we can learn from them and work together to improve the system that contributed to their broken dreams.

The participants suggested procedures which could possibly assist other teachers with their reentry process. The findings do suggest that there are possible areas for improved services to teachers on EDL. Suggestions for required services or modifications to existing procedures were derived from information provided by the participants as well as from the literature. Based upon these sources there is a need for an expanded role for Employee Assistance Program (EAP) services for boards that have them, more prompt delivery of services, greater use of alternative employment models, and integrated return to work procedures.

The Employee Assistance Plan

One interesting fact the researcher found was that in some school jurisdictions the teachers who eventually went on Short Term

Leave and then EDL did not necessarily have to go through the Employee Assistance Programs of boards that had them. The researcher believes that going through an EAP has potential benefits for the teacher going on EDL. Some of the benefits may be in the initial referral to medical and psychological services during the Short Term Leave cycle. Another important role could be to help and guide the teachers through the documentation required by the insurance carrier, a source of concern by several of the teachers. The EAP could also be a source of ongoing information concerning support groups in the area and other activities for teachers on EDL. There could also be a role for the EAP staff in developing a library of resources about health and disability as it specifically applies to teachers. Perhaps a sharing and acknowledgment of what is going on would be a start to publicly recognize that there is a problem and then work towards resolving it. Such sharing could come in the form of an EAP establishing and presenting information sessions to school board officials and employees about health problems in the division, methods of prevention, the EDL process, including what it is like to be on EDL and the experiences faced upon coming back to work. Such information might lead to a greater appreciation for the need to maintain good health and to understand and increase sensitivity towards those who have health related illness and are attempting to return to work. The expanded role of the EAP would provide for a more coordinated approach, ease the burden and anxiety of returning teachers and provide more timely delivery of services. Ryan and Jevne (1993) also proposed expanding the services of the EAP programs for teachers. Their program would offer prevention services, rehabilitation services and planning and development services. As well, Cherniss (1995) called for an examination of the environment in which employees work and address areas of concern as well as provide opportunities to learn new skills. These could be areas of possible expansion for an EAP program.

More Prompt Delivery of Services

Once a teacher goes on leave, it is important they receive services promptly. Such was not the case by several of the study's participants. During the researcher's last few months at the Workers' Compensation Board, the staff were adopting a new delivery model that stressed early intervention. The purpose for the new model of early intervention was to reduce the number of workers adopting disabled attitudes and secondary gain issues and allowing them to return to work more quickly and in better health. One possible area for teachers on EDL where this may be explored is in the area of counselling specifically group counselling. The insurance carrier, for the majority of Alberta teachers it is the ASEBP, and it could sponsor such sessions which could be made available for those who felt able to attend. These groups would be voluntary, sponsored by the ASEBP and provided by psychologists who did not work directly for the carrier. Confidentially for the teachers taking part in these groups would contribute to their success. Such groups could potentially deal with issues of emotionality, isolation, sharing with other teachers who are also on EDL, relaxation techniques, issues of self esteem. Education could be provided on various aspects such as stress management, depression, and the effects of unrealistic personal beliefs and their modification.

Another suggestion would be to make more use of Rehabilitation employment as a method of preparing or transitioning teachers from EDL to work. As mentioned by two of the study's participants, they found this really helpful in bridging the gap from not working to working again. This type of employment has increased over the last few years and should be sustained.

Returning to Work

Once the decision has been made to go back to work, the teacher and human resource personnel should meet to discuss the possible options that do exist for returning to work. The teacher should be able, as much as possible, to negotiate a placement and an attempt should be made to find the placement where the teacher feels he/she would be more likely to succeed. School boards should be, and it would appear that some are, flexible in their return requirements in terms of teaching less than full time. Each teacher should have his/her own individual return to work plan and he/she has to be instrumental in the construction of this plan.

When the teacher is returning to work, the EAP could be one of the first points of contacts for the teachers and could be a source of ongoing support. This support could be in the form of offering supportive group counselling or other activities as requested by the teachers.

Implications for Counselling

The experience of rehabilitation is a complex experience that often shakes or damages the foundations upon which our lives have been constructed. This was indeed the experience of the participants. As well, these teachers are part of a system that some believe has contributed dramatically to their going on EDL and then reentering. As a result issues causing the problems must be dealt as well as the problems of reentry. The majority of the participants sought psychological help to deal with their issues while on leave and several continued with their treatment while working. Some of the important counselling issues resulted from research were the need to challenge the irrational personal beliefs about self and teaching, working through the feelings that are associated with EDL such as isolation, fear and hopelessness and issues surrounding depression, relationships and acceptance. The researcher also agrees with Jevne and al., (1994) that "interventions which assist with adjustment to limitations, establishing new personal boundaries and restoring confidence, self worth and hope" are within the domain of counsellors. Counsellors providing these interventions will help teachers as they attempt reentry. Often there was a need for continuing counselling for these underlying issues while back at work as well as the need for supportive counseling for current problems. Psychologists who provide services to clients on EDL must be aware of the interplay of counselling issues that are present. There was also a number of participants who sought out group counselling as a way to help facilitate change. There is a need for an expanded role in this area or at least more coordination of services. Group counselling could be an important method in addressing the issue of isolation, sharing, providing support as well as providing a means of educating the teachers about the many aspects of their illness, understanding as to how it is affecting their lives and ways of coping better.

Implications for Future Research

Out of the present research, several areas arose which generated ideas for future research. The researcher has used thematic analysis, similar to that of Colaizzi (1978), to provide a description and understanding of the experience. However, there are other qualitative approaches that could be used to explore these topics (Streubert and Carpenter, 1995).

One suggestion would be to complete a similar study using teachers in rural areas as the sample base to determine if their experiences differ from the urban sample and compare the results with the present study.

Still another area would be to explore this phenomenon with younger teachers, those with less then ten years experience.

The role of the school based administrator has been stated to have a profound affect on the teacher in the classroom. Certainly, some of the participants stated that the perceived actions of some administrators contributed to their health problems. As a result research should be conducted to determine more fully the impact of the teacher-administrator relationship and its perceived relationship to teacher health and, more specifically, to successful reentry to the classroom.

The majority of the teachers sought assistance from support groups during their experience. Several of the teachers felt these groups were important in their recovery process. It would be important to examine what exactly the groups provided the teachers that they viewed as helpful and not so helpful.

Finally, the research would indicate that teachers leaving the classroom due to ill health is not only happening in Alberta but in other provinces in Canada. As they have left so too will many of them try to reenter the classroom when they feel ready. This being the case, it would be informative to explore this phenomenon from a national perspective to determine how unique or similar the experience is to that found in the large urban areas of Alberta.

Personal Reflections

My reasons for conducting the research were in large measure an interest in the area developed by watching several of my friends go through the experience of EDL and then attempting to return to work. Some were successful, some were not and went back out again. In time I began to become aware that their disabling condition was having a devastating effect on them personally. Teachers who were once involved in everything in a school, I witnessed having to negotiate class placement, working less than half time, taking medication to keep them going and having regular appointments with medical and psychological care providers. Yet in spite of this, two of them had to go back on EDL again. A quantitative approach could have used to gather data for the study but in doing that I believe I would have missed the human experience. Although each participant had his/her own unique experience, a detailed examination of each script and validating the researcher's findings with each, common themes emerged from the data which helped capture the experience. These themes provide structure and can be used to help describe the experience and lead to an understanding of the experience.

I consider myself privileged to have met these teachers and to journey with them for a while. I believe that their contribution has lead to a better understanding of experience of returning to work after being on EDL. As mentioned before, their journey is a journey of struggle and achievement, and also one of courage and bravery. Their experiences can be used constructively to help others who may be on the journey and may even lessen the impact, in some cases, of the need for EDL. It would be a mistake, a mistake our society seems intent on continuing to make, that rather then listening to and learning from those have lived the experience, we ignore and do nothing. I would suggest that it would be the wish of my co researchers that we learn from them.

Summary

This study is significant in a number of ways. First, its major focus has been the lived experience of teachers as they try to enter the classroom after being on EDL. In reviewing the literature, research in this specific area is extremely rare. From this sustained examination, despite the uniqueness of each participant's experience, a series of common themes arose which help describe and provide for understanding of the experience. Some of these commonalities emerged in the Jevne and Zingle (1992) study, and this is not surprising because they too examined the problems associated with teacher disability in the province. Second, the present study's participants have been educators who have gone through the experience in large urban centres is the province of Alberta. Third, since research into the broad subject of EDL is limited, this study has contributed to knowledge in this area. Fourth, from the descriptions provided by the participants, a series of recommendations were put forward which could address some of the areas of difficulties for some teachers as they attempt to reenter the classroom.

The lived experience of teachers who return to work after having been on EDL in the province of Alberta is indeed one that is filled with much emotion as they face many personal challenges. The process strikes at the very core of the individual. Many of the things, like health and work that were previously taken for granted have been taken away, at least temporarily, and for some replaced by having to deal with career limitations. Reentry itself is the goal of the majority teachers on EDL. The road back to the classroom involves time to heal, personal reflection about their world, and their role in that world. It also involves the continuing support of many different people. People along the way help teachers come to an understanding of what is happening to them, to confirm and reaffirm their self worth as people and educators and to provide encouragement that makes it possible to reenter the classroom and to continue to teach even on a less than fulltime basis.

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Appendix A

Sample Letter Sent to School Boards

18207 61 Avenue
Edmonton, AB
T6M 1T6

June 1996

Counsellor
Employee Assistance Program
_______ Board of Education

Dear __________

My name is Lewis Michael MacKay and I am a Ph.D. candidate in the Department of Educational Psychology at the University of Alberta. As well, I am a counsellor in a large urban Alberta Junior /Senior High School. I am conducting a research study which will explore the experience of educators who re enter the school system after being on Long Term Disability Leave. The purpose of the study is to contribute to the knowledge base of this relatively unexplored area and to contribute to the development of a re entry model which could help educators with this process. This study forms part of my requirements for the completion of the Doctoral Program in School Psychology. My supervisors for this research are Dr. Barbara Paulson and Dr. Ronna Jevne from the Department of Educational Psychology, University of Alberta.

I am looking for individuals to participate in this study. The participants will take part in a series of two individual interviews. At the first session, a consent form will be read and explained and participation agreed to by having the participant sign the consent form. Once the consent form has been signed, the first interview will take place. This interview, which will last about an hour, will be audiotaped and will be used to gather data on the experiences as reported by the educator upon his/her return to the classroom. At this time other pertinent demographic information such as sex, age, grade level, years of teaching experience, and education will be obtained. The second interview will allow the participants to review the transcripted interview and to make changes or to validate it as it is.

Confidentially will be maintained in the following ways. The interviews will be held away from the work site. Any information that might identify the co researcher shall be deleted from the research findings. Upon completion of the study, the audiotape transcripts will be destroyed and the tapes will be destroyed unless return of it is requested by each participant individually.

Once the study is completed, I will forward each participant a summary of the results I obtained as well as a brief outline of the recommendations. As well, upon request, a summary of the results obtained and a brief outline of recommendations will be made available to school boards and ATA Locals.

I would appreciate it if you would make your teachers aware of this study. I have taken the liberty to enclose an advertisement that could be inserted in your local employee news bulletin providing basic details of the study. Further details about the study can be obtained by phoning me at the number below. I thank you very much for your co operation in this matter.

Respectfully,

Lewis Michael Mackay
(403) 444-7376

Appendix B

Interview Guidelines

I am interested in your experience of returning to work after being on long term leave. In order to help me understand the experience, I would like you to answer the following questions and please feel free to add anything else which you may feel is important for me to know about the experience. Thank you.

1. Why did you take leave in the first place?
2. How did you prepare yourself for your return?
3. What were your initial reactions to going back to work?
4. Do you remember what it felt like upon re entering the school?
5. What happened for you upon return?
6. Who was helpful to you at the school? What did they do that you perceived as helpful?
7. Who was not helpful to you at the school? What did they do that you perceived as not helpful?
8. If you could advise other teachers on long term leave, about re entering the classroom, what would you tell them?
9. If you could advise a school board, on the reintegration of teachers coming back after being on long term leave, what would you tell them?
10. In general, how would you describe your re entry experience to date?

Appendix C

Participant Consent Form

I am conducting a research study which will explore the experience of educators who re enter the school system after being on long term disability leave. This dissertation forms part of my requirements for the completion of the Doctoral Program in School Psychology. The purpose of the study is to contribute to the knowledge of reentry experiences of educators who return to the school system after being on Long term disability leave and to use this knowledge to develop a reentry model which could help educators with this process.

The information for this study will come primarily from interviews which will be audiotaped. At the first session, this consent form will be read and explained and participation agreed to by having the participant sign the consent form. Once the Consent Form has been signed the first interview will take place and, at this time, the interview guide questions will be used to gather data for the study. At this time other gather pertinent demographic information such as sex, age, grade level, years of teaching experience, and education will be also obtained. Responses to the Interview guide will be audiotaped and this first session should last about an hour. The second meeting will allow the participant and researcher to review the transcripted interview and to make changes or to validate it as it is.

Any information that might identify the coresearcher shall be deleted from the research findings. With regard to the tapes used in interviewing, they will be numbered. The tape number will correspond to a number given to the person interviewed. Upon completion of the study, the master list of names and the transcripts will be destroyed and the tapes unless return of it is requested by each co researcher, individually, will be destroyed

Please indicate by placing an "X" in the appropriate spot

I would like the audiotape returned to me upon completion of the study.

________ Yes ______ No

The material gathered from the study may be published. The co researcher has the right to refuse to answer any questions and withdraw from the study at any time.

Discussing a time in your life which may have been especially difficult for you may cause you to experience some emotional discomfort as you partake in the interview process. If you find that some issues that are raised need further therapeutic attention, I will recommend you for counselling unless you are already receiving counselling. In this latter case I would recommend that you bring these issues to these counselling sessions.

Once the study is completed, I will forward each participant a summary of the results I obtained as well as a brief outline of the recommendations.

Having read the above description of the project, I have an understanding of:

i) the purpose and nature of the project,
ii) the expected benefits,
iii) the tasks involved,
iv) the inconveniences and risks
v) the identity of those involved in the project,
vi) who will receive the information,
vii) how the information will be used
viii) the right to give or withhold consent for participation,
ix) the right to withdraw at any time during the process,
x) how confidentially will be maintained,
xi) the disposal of the audiotape upon completion of the study.

I give my informed consent to participate in this project.

Signed ____________________ **Dated**___________

Researcher ________________ **Dated**___________

Appendix D

Partial Interview Transcript

Interviewer

I can appreciate that. How did you prepare yourself for your return?

Participant

Oh With great great trepidation.

Interviewer

Okay, how did you prepare yourself for your return to work?

Participant

I tried really hard to get my health back. I can't exercise much anymore because of the injuries, the joint injuries and it makes everything worse. But I spent time trying to psych myself up to go for the job interview. When I got there, I felt they were very suspicious of me and I got told then that if I felt I was not well enough, not to even bother coming back because it wasn't fair to children if I was going to get sick again. I felt down in my heart that they've been told, I don't know this, but I felt they've been told I wasn't really sick that I've just given up or gone on a holiday or something. That's what I felt in my heart-nobody ever said it directly to me. I tried to get as much done as I could in the summer. ... and got the room organized, and got some long range plans started, and met with my teaching partner. My new teaching partner and I went down to the resource library to find curriculum changes so that I would be ready for that. I just tried to get my health back. I tried to rest as much as I could, tried to stretch, and that's all I could do. That was as much as I could do.

Interviewer

Right! What were your initial reactions to going back to work?

Participant

Just terror, absolute terror, and the knowledge that I already had a file of things against me and that somebody else might be able to afford to make a mistake but I never could. I felt that the administration was civil, but that they were extremely suspicious and that they felt they'd sort have been stuck with a 'pig in a poke'. I was still having the stress reactions or whatever they were. I was taking anti inflammatories and things for the pain because part of my job was ... and I had to take anti inflammatories to be able to get through a ... class. That of course started the whole stomach bleeding syndrome again and I was afraid that I wasn't going to be able to do it.

Interviewer

Right

Participant

I just was very fearful, but I felt I couldn't afford not do it either professionally or financially.

Interviewer

Right

Participant
156. My confidence was so shaken that I think
157. I'm just starting now to feel that I'm
158. getting back some confidence. The things that I had been
159. criticized for, torn apart for at the previous school, I'm
160. receiving compliments for at this new school.

Interviewer
161. Right

Participant
167.I was really criticized for doing the ... program
168.in the class. That was right out of the blue, because I
169.certainly had asked permission before I'd brought my
170. ...into the
171.classroom.
173.Everything I had brought into the
174.class, I had had administrative permission to do.

Participant
176. Those letters that
178.imply that my missing school without reason ...
179. ... I appreciated the support of the parents.
180.I wouldn't have made it the last two or three years
181.without them.

Participant
182. That's how I started back to the new school this year,
183.almost without knowing what was good teaching and what
184.wasn't anymore.

Interviewer
185. Had to go back and redefine it again?

Participant

This administration is very complimentary. I've had to choke back tears a couple of times when they've come in and made some comment about wow that's a wonderful project or something. It's hit me so hard, I haven't even been able to accept a compliment graciously. I'm just starting to laugh again.

Interviewer

Oh that's excellent

Participant

We joke around in the staff room and things like that. I hadn't realized that I'd gotten that low. Friends outside of school have commented that this is the first time I have smiled in years. So

Interviewer

Living in that environment would take its toll

Participant

It was a nightmare, it was a nightmare

Interviewer

Do you remember what it felt like upon reentering the school?

Participant

Just really scared, fearing it was going to be a repeat, fearing that I couldn't overcome the things that had been said and written about me. Fearing that after the administration told me that, you know, if I wasn't up to it not to bother coming back. I was told going back if you can't do it, it is not fair to the kids and I agree with that too. I was afraid I couldn't. I had a few anxiety collapses through the summer when I was in school. I just blacked out for an hour or so at a time alone. I know that was anxiety, that I was afraid I wasn't going to be able to do it.

Appendix E

Sample Transcript Analysis

The transcript was then analyzed using the following procedure

Meaning Unit	Paraphrase	Code	Tag
110. How did you prepare yourself for 111. your return?	How did you get ready to come back?	Getting ready to come back?	Clarification
112. Oh! with great great trepidation	With great trepidation	Great trepidation	Great trepidation
115. I tried really hard to get my health 77.back. I can't 116. exercise much anymore because of my injuries, the joint 117. injuries and it makes everything worse.	I tried really hard to get my health back but exercise is difficult because of my injuries	Trying to get health back, exercise difficult	Restoring health

117. But I spent, 118. time trying to psych myself up to go for the 119. job interview. When I got there, I felt they were very 120. suspicious of me and I got told then that if I was not 121. well enough, not to even bother coming back because it 122.wasn't fair to children if I was going to get sick again.	I concentrated on getting ready for the job interview. I believed that they did not trust me. They told me that if I was not well enough do not consider coming back because it would not be fair to the children if I had to go out again	Getting ready for the job interview, felt I was not trusted, told me if not well enough do not some back not fair to the children	Interview
123. I felt down in my heart they've been told, I don't know 124. this, but I felt they've been told I wasn't really sick 125. that I've just given up or gone on a holiday or something. 126. That's what I felt in my heart , nobody ever said it directly to 127. me	I believed that they not been told that I was not really sick but rather on holiday or something.Nobody ever said this, but I do believe it.	Believed they were told that I really was not sick, really believe this	Personal beliefs

127. I tried to get as much done as I could in the 128. summer. to prepare the classroom organized and got some 130. long range plans started, and met my teaching131. partner. My new teaching partner and I went down to the 132. resource library to find curriculum 133. changes so that I would be ready for that.	Once I got the job I worked as much as I could in the summer to prepare the classroom. I also met my teaching partner. We went to the resource library to look for any curriculum so I would be ready	Worked as much as possible during the during summer the also worked with teaching partner	Preparing for class
133. I just tried 134, to get my health back. I tried to rest as much as 135 I could, tried to stretch, and that's all I could do. 136. That was as much as I could do.	I tried to get my health back by resting.	Get health back by resting	Restoring the body, resting
137. Right. What were your initial reactions to going back to 138. work?	How did you feel about going back to work?	Feelings about going back to work?	Clarification

139. Just terror, absolute terror, and the knowledge that 140. already had a file of things against me and that somebody 141. else might be able to afford a mistake but I never 142. could. I felt the administration was 143, civil, but that they were extremely suspicious and that 144. they felt they'd sort have been stuck with a "pig in a poke.	I felt absolute terror. I was worried about what they had in my file and that they could hold against me. Someone else could . make a mistake but I couldn't. I felt the administration did not trust me and that they felt they had been stuck with a 'pig in a poke.'	Terror , worried about what they had in my file, felt could not make a mistake, a pig in a poke	Terror No room for error
145. I was still having stress reactions or whatever they 146. were. I was taking anti inflammatories and things for the 147. pain because part of the job was ... and I 148. had to take anti-inflammatories to be able to get through That of course started the whole 150.stomach bleeding syndrome again and I was afraid that I 151 wasn't going to	I was still having stress reactions or whatever. I was ... anti-inflammatories ... . That started my stomach bleeding again and I was scared that I might not be able to continue to work	Stress reactions, taking anti-inflammatories, started stomach bleeding, scared may not be able to work	Body in pain Medications

153. I was very fearful. but I felt I couldn't afford 154. not to do it either professionally or financially.	I was very fearful, I could not afford it either professionally or financially	Fearful, could not afford this professionally or financially	Fearful
155 My confidence was so shaken that I think 156 I'm just starting now to feel that I'm 157 getting back some confidence. The things that I had been 158. criticized for, torn apart for at the previous school, I'm 159. receiving complaints for at this new school	My confidence was weakened, I feel that I am just regaining some confidence. What I was criticized for at the other school I'am being praised for at this school.	Confidence weakened just regaining some now, criticized before praised now.	Conflicting views
167.I was really criticized for doing... program 168. in class. That was right out of the blue because I 169. certainly had permission before I'd brought my 170. ... and things pertaining to ... into the classroom. 173	I was criticized for doing the ... unit.I asked the administration before I brought the materials in and I got permission.	Criticized for doing the ... unit, asked and got permission from administration	Getting permission

176. Those letters... imply that my missing school without reason...179. I appreciated the support of the parents. 180. I wouldn't have made it the last two or three years 181 without them.	Letters written by administration imply missing school without reason. Had support of parents and without that would not have made it during the last two or three years.	Letters about me missing school without reason, supportive parents important to me	Supportive Parents
182. That's how I started back to the new school this year, 183, almost without knowing what was good teaching and what 184. wasn't anymore.	Started back to school this year almost without knowing what good teaching was or wasn't anymore.	Almost did not know what good teaching was or was not	Questioning self
186. This administration is very complimentary. I've had to 187. choke back the tears a couple of times when they've come in 188. and made some comment about wow that's a wonderful 189. project or something. It hit me so hard I haven't been able to accept a compliment graciously. 191. I'm just starting to laugh again.	The administration is very complimentary, I have become overwhelmed at times, choke back the tears due to their compliments I have had a hard time to accept compliments. I am just starting to laugh again	Administration is complimentary, overwhelmed at times, hard to accept compliments, just starting to laugh again	Supportive administration Laughing again

193.We joke around in the staffroom and things like that, 194. I hadn't realized I had gotten that low. Friends outside 195. of school have commented that this is the first time I 196.have smiled in years.	We joke around as a staff, did not realize how low I was. Friends stated that this is the first time they have seen me laugh in years	Staff jokes around very low, first time friends have said they saw me laugh in years	Supportive staff Laughing again
199. Do you remember what it felt like upon reentering the 200. school?	What did it feel like upon reentering school?	Feel upon reentering school	Clarification
201. Just really scared, fearing that it was going to be a repeat, 202. fearing that I could not overcome the things that had been 203.said and written about me. Fearing that after the 204. administration told me that, you know, if I wasn't upto it 205. not to bother coming back. I was told you 206. can't do it, it is not fair	Really scared, feeling that I could not overcome the things that had been written and said about me. Fearing that I may not be up to the challenge as it would not be fair to the kids. I agreed with that too.	Scared, wondering whether or not I could overcome what was said about me. Could I do it?	Personal doubts Fear

207. I was afraid I couldn't. I had a few anxiety collapses 208. through the summer .... I just blacked 209. out for an hour or so at a time alone. I know that was 210 anxiety, that I was afraid I wasn't going to be able to it.	I was afraid that I could not do it. I had a few anxiety attacks during the summer. I blacked out at times, I was afraid I was not going to be able to do it.	Afraid I could not do it, anxiety attacks during the summer	Personal doubts Anxiety

Appendix F

Themes Arising from the Interview

Restoring Health

Family heritage (82-86)
Personal disbelief (91-93)
Great Trepidation (112)
Restoring Health (115-117)
Restoring the body (134-136)
Supportive parents (177-180)

Going back to work

Interview preparation (118-122)
Personal beliefs (123-127)
Preparing for class (128-133)
Terror (139)
No room for error (140-144)
Body in pain (145-151)
Fearful (153)
Questioning self (182-184)
Personal doubts (201-203, 207)
Fear (210-205)
Anxiety (207-210)

Working once again

Questioning self (182-184)
Supportive Administration (186-190, 247-252)
Laughing again (191, 195-196)
Supportive staff (193, 230-237, 256-258, 260-265)
Positive climate (271-274)
A good work site (240)
Questioning self (241-246)
Feeling better (252,276)
Collegiality (266-270)
No one unhelpful (280-281)
Assistance on reentry (287-292, 294)

Advice to teachers

Help from ATA (299-301)
Good use of time (302-309)

Advice to school boards

Teacher welfare (313-320)
Proper placement(321-324)
Involvement with teachers (325-330)

Reentry to date

Positive feelings (333,335)
Increasing confidence (336-337)
Positive growth (340-342, 346-349)
Supportive network (352-355)